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1867

CHARACTERISTICS

OF

WOMEN.

Moral, Poetical, and Historical.

WITH

Illustrations from the Author's Designs.

BY MRS. JAMESON,

AUTHOR OF "MEMOIRS OF FEMALE SOVEREIGNS;" "LEGENDS OF THE MADONNA;" "SACRED AND LEGENDARY ART;" "LEGENDS OF THE MONASTIC ORDERS," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

New Edition.

LONDON:
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.
1858.

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PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

In preparing for the press a second edition of this little work, the author has endeavoured to render it more worthy of the approbation and kindly feeling with which it has been received: she cannot better express her sense of both than by justifying, as far as it is in her power, the cordial and flattering tone of all the public criticisms. It is to the great name of Shakspeare, that a bond of sympathy among all who speak his language, and to the subject of the work, not to its own merits, that she attributes the success it has met with,—success the more delightful, because, in truth, it was from the very first so entirely unlooked for, as to be a matter of surprise as well as of pleasure and gratitude.

In this edition there are many corrections, and some additions, which the author hopes may be deemed improvements. She has

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been induced to insert several quotations at length, which were formerly only referred to, from observing, that however familiar they may be to the mind of the reader, they are always recognised with pleasure—like dear domestic faces; and if the memory fail at the moment to recall the lines or the sentiment to which the attention is directly required, few like to interrupt the course of thought, or undertake a journey from the sofa or garden-seat to the library, to hunt out the volume, the play, the passage, for themselves.

When the first edition was sent to press, the author contemplated writing the Life of Mrs. Siddons, with a reference to her art; and deferred the complete development of the character of Lady Macbeth till she should be able to illustrate it by the impersonation and commentary of that grand and gifted actress; but the task having fallen into other hands, the analysis of the character has been almost entirely re-written, as at first conceived, or rather restored to its original form.

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Characters of the Affections.

Characters in which the affections and the moral qualities predominate over fancy and all that bears the name of passion, are not, when we meet with them in real life,

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the most striking and interesting, nor the easiest to be understood and appreciated; but they are those on which, in the long run, we repose with increasing confidence and ever-new delight. Such characters are not easily exhibited in the colours of poetry, and when we meet with them there, we are reminded of the effect of Raffaelle's pictures. Sir Joshua Reynolds assures us that it took him three weeks to discover the beauty of the frescos in the Vatican; and many, if they spoke truth, would prefer one of Titian's or Murillo's Virgins to one of Raffaelle's heavenly Madonnas. The less there is of marked expression or vivid colour in a countenance or character, the more difficult to delineate it in such a manner as to captivate and interest us: but when this is done, and done to perfection, it is the miracle of poetry in painting, and of painting in poetry. Only Raffaelle and Correggio have achieved it in one case, and only Shakspeare in the other.

When, by the presence or the agency of some predominant and exciting power, the

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feelings and affections are upturned from the depths of the heart, and flung to the surface, the painter or the poet has but to watch the workings of the passions, thus in a manner made visible, and transfer them to his page or his canvas, in colours more or less vigorous: but where all is calm without and around, to dive into the profoundest abysses of character, trace the affections where they lie hidden like the ocean springs, wind into the most intricate involutions of the heart, patiently unravel its most delicate fibres, and in a few graceful touches place before us the distinct and visible result,—to do this demanded power of another and a rarer kind.

There are several of Shakspeare's characters which are especially distinguished by this profound feeling in the conception, and subdued harmony of tone in the delineation. To them may be particularly applied the ingenious simile which Goëthe has used to illustrate generally all Shakspeare's characters, when he compares them to the old-fashioned watches in glass cases, which not

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only showed the index pointing to the hour, but the wheels and springs within, which set that index in motion.

Imogen, Desdemona, and Hermione, are three women placed in situations nearly similar, and equally endowed with all the qualities which can render that situation striking and interesting. They are all gentle, beautiful, and innocent; all are models of conjugal submission, truth, and tenderness; and all are victims of the unfounded jealousy of their husbands. So far the parallel is close, but here the resemblance ceases; the circumstances of each situation are varied with wonderful skill, and the characters, which are as different as it is possible to imagine, conceived and discriminated with a power of truth and a delicacy of feeling yet more astonishing.

Critically speaking, the character of Hermione is the most simple in point of dramatic effect, that of Imogen is the most varied and complex. Hermione is most distinguished by her magnanimity and her fortitude, Desdemona by her gentleness and

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refined grace; while Imogen combines all the best qualities of both, with others which they do not possess; consequently she is, as a character, superior to either; but considered as women, I suppose the preference would depend on individual taste.

Hermione is the heroine of the three first acts of the Winter's Tale. She is the wife of Leontes, king of Sicilia, and though in the prime of beauty and womanhood, is not represented in the first bloom of youth. Her husband on slight grounds suspects her of infidelity with his friend Polixenes, king of Bohemia; the suspicion once admitted, and working on a jealous, passionate, and vindictive mind, becomes a settled and confirmed opinion. Hermione is thrown into a dungeon; her new-born infant is taken from her, and, by the order of her husband, frantic with jealousy, exposed to death on a desert shore; she is herself brought to a public trial for treason and incontinency, defends herself nobly, and is pronounced innocent by the oracle. But at the very moment that she is acquitted,

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she learns the death of the prince her son, who

> Conceiving the dishonour of his mother,
> Had straight declined, drooped, took it deeply,
> Fastened and fixed the shame on 't in himself,
> Threw off his spirit, appetite, and sleep,
> And downright languished.

She swoons away with grief, and her supposed death concludes the third act. The two last acts are occupied with the adventures of her daughter Perdita; and with the restoration of Perdita to the arms of her mother, and the reconciliation of Hermione and Leontes, the piece concludes.

Such, in few words, is the dramatic situation. The character of Hermione exhibits what is never found in the other sex, but rarely in our own—yet sometimes;—dignity without pride, love without passion, and tenderness without weakness. To conceive a character in which there enters so much of the negative, required perhaps no rare and astonishing effort of genius, such as created a Juliet, a Miranda, or a lady Mac-

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beth; but to delineate such a character in the poetical form, to develope it through the medium of action and dialogue, without the aid of description: to preserve its tranquil, mild, and serious beauty, its unimpassioned dignity, and at the same time keep the strongest hold upon our sympathy and our imagination; and out of this exterior calm produce the most profound pathos, the most vivid impression of life and internal power:—it is this which renders the character of Hermione one of Shakspeare's master-pieces.

Hermione is a queen, a matron, and a mother; she is good and beautiful, and royally descended. A majestic sweetness, a grand and gracious simplicity, an easy, unforced, yet dignified self-possession, are in all her deportment, and in every word she utters. She is one of those characters, of whom it has been said proverbially, that "still waters run deep." Her passions are not vehement, but in her settled mind the sources of pain or pleasure, love or resentment, are like the springs that feed the

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mountain lakes, impenetrable, unfathomable, and inexhaustible.

Shakspeare has conveyed (as is his custom) a part of the character of Hermione in scattered touches, and through the impressions which she produces on all around her. Her surpassing beauty is alluded to in few but strong terms:—

> This jealousy
> Is for a precious creature; as she is rare
> Must it be great.
> Praise her but for this her out-door form,
> (Which, on my faith, deserves high speech—)
>
> If one by one you wedded all the world,
> Or from the all that are, took something good
> To make a perfect woman; she you killed
> Would be unparalleled.
>
> I might have looked upon my queen's full eyes,
> Have taken treasure from her lips—
> —— and left them
> More rich for what they yielded.

The expressions "most sacred lady," "dread mistress," "sovereign," with which she is addressed or alluded to, the boundless

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devotion and respect of those around her, and their confidence in her goodness and innocence, are so many additional strokes in the portrait.

> For her, my lord,
> I dare my life lay down, and will do 't, sir,
> Please you t' accept it, that the queen is spotless
> I' the eyes of heaven, and to you.
>
> Every inch of woman in the world,
> Ay, every dram of woman's flesh is false,
> If she be so.
> I would not be a stander-by to hear
> My sovereign mistress clouded so, without
> My present vengeance taken!

The mixture of playful courtesy, queenly dignity, and lady-like sweetness, with which she prevails on Polixenes to prolong his visit, is charming.

> HERMIONE.
>
> You 'll stay?
>
> POLIXENES.
>
> No, madam.
>
> HERMIONE.
>
> Nay, but you will.

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POLIXENES.

I may not, verily.

HERMIONE.

Verily!
You put me off with limber vows; but I,
Tho' you would seek t' unsphere the stars with oaths,
Should still say, "Sir, no going!" Verily,
You shall *not* go! A lady's verily is
As potent as a lord's. Will you go yet?
Force me to keep you as a prisoner,
Not like a guest?

And though the situation of Hermione admits but of few general reflections, one little speech, inimitably beautiful and characteristic, has become almost proverbial from its truth. She says,—

One good deed, dying tongueless,
Slaughters a thousand, waiting upon that.
Our praises are our wages; you may ride us
With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs, ere
With spur we heat an acre.

She receives the first intimation of her husband's jealous suspicions with incredulous astonishment. It is not that, like Desdemona, she does not, or cannot understand:

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but she *will* not. When he accuses her more plainly, she replies with a calm dignity—

> Should a villain say so—
> The most replenished villain in the world—
> He were as much more villain: you, my lord,
> Do but mistake.

This characteristic composure of temper never forsakes her; and yet it is so delineated that the impression is that of grandeur, and never borders upon pride or coldness: it is the fortitude of a gentle but a strong mind, conscious of its own innocence. Nothing can be more affecting than her calm reply to Leontes, who, in his jealous rage, heaps insult upon insult, and accuses her before her own attendants, as no better "than one of those to whom the vulgar give bold titles."

> How will this grieve you
> When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that
> You have thus published me! Gentle my lord,
> You scarce can right me thoroughly then, to say
> You *did* mistake.

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Her mild dignity and saint-like patience, combined as they are with the strongest sense of the cruel injustice of her husband, thrill us with admiration as well as pity; and we cannot but see and feel, that for Hermione to give way to tears and feminine complaints under such a blow, would be quite incompatible with the character. Thus she says of herself, as she is led to prison:

> There 's some ill planet reigns:
> I must be patient till the heavens look
> With an aspéct more favourable. Good my lords,
> I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
> Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
> Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have
> That honourable grief lodged here, that burns
> Worse than tears drown. Beseech you all, my lords,
> With thoughts so qualified as your charities
> Shall best instruct you, measure me; and so
> The king's will be performed.

When she is brought to trial for supposed crimes, called on to defend herself, "standing to prate and talk for life and honour, before who please to come and hear," the sense of her ignominious situation—all its

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shame and all its horror press upon her, and would apparently crush even *her* magnanimous spirit, but for the consciousness of her own worth and innocence, and the necessity that exists for asserting and defending both.

> If powers divine
> Behold our humau action (as they do),
> I doubt not, then, but innocence shall make
> False accusation blush, and tyranny
> Tremble at patience.
> * * * * *
>
> For life, I prize it
> As I weigh grief, which I would spare. For honour—
> 'T is a derivative from me to mine,
> And only that I stand for.

Her earnest, eloquent justification of herself, and her lofty sense of female honour, are rendered more affecting and impressive by that chilling despair, that contempt for a life which has been made bitter to her through unkindness, which is betrayed in every word of her speech, though so calmly characteristic. When she enumerates the unmerited insults which have been heaped

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upon her, it is without asperity or reproach, yet in tone which shows how completely the iron has entered her soul. Thus, when Leontes threatens her with death:—

> Sir, spare your threats:
> The bug which you would fright me with I seek.
> To me can life be no commodity;
> The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,
> I do give lost; for I do feel it gone,
> But know not how it went. My second joy,
> The first-fruits of my body, from his presence
> I am barr'd, like one infectious. My third comfort—
> Starr'd most unluckily!—is from my breast,
> The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth,
> Haled out to murder. Myself on every post
> Proclaimed a strumpet; with immodest hatred,
> The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs
> To women of all fashion. Lastly, hurried
> Here to this place, i' the open air, before
> I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,
> Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
> That I should fear to die. Therefore, proceed,
> But hear ye this; mistake me not. No! life,
> I prize it not a straw:—but for mine honour
> (Which I would free), if I shall be condemned
> Upon surmises; all proof sleeping else,
> But what your jealousies awake; I tell you,
> 'T is rigour and not law.

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The character of Hermione is considered open to criticism on one point. I have heard it remarked, that when she secludes herself from the world for sixteen years, during which time she is mourned as dead by her repentant husband, and is not won to relent from her resolve by his sorrow, his remorse, his constancy to her memory: such conduct, argues the critic, is unfeeling as it is inconceivable in a tender and virtuous woman. Would Imogen have done so, who is so generously ready to grant a pardon before it be asked? or Desdemona, who does not forgive because she cannot even resent? No, assuredly; but this is only another proof of the wonderful delicacy and consistency with which Shakspeare has discriminated the characters of all three. The incident of Hermione's supposed death and concealment for sixteen years, is not indeed very probable in itself, nor very likely to occur in every-day life. But besides all the probability necessary for the purposes of poetry, it has all the likelihood it can derive from the peculiar character of Her-

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mione, who is precisely the woman who could and would have acted in this manner. In such a mind as hers, the sense of a cruel injury, inflicted by one she had loved and trusted, without awakening any violent anger or any desire of vengeance, would sink deep—almost incurably and lastingly deep. So far she is most unlike either Imogen or Desdemona, who are portrayed as much more flexible in temper; but then the circumstances under which she is wronged are very different, and far more unpardonable. The self-created, frantic jealousy of Leontes is very distinct from that of Othello, writhing under the arts of Iago: or that of Posthumus, whose understanding has been cheated by the most damning evidence of his wife's infidelity. The jealousy which in Othello and Posthumus is an error of judgment, in Leontes is a vice of the blood; he suspects without cause, condemns without proof; he is without excuse—unless the mixture of pride, passion, and imagination, and the predisposition to jealousy with

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which Shakspeare has portrayed him, be considered as an excuse. Hermione has been openly insulted: he to whom she gave herself, her heart, her soul, has stooped to the weakness and baseness of suspicion; has doubted her truth; has wronged her love; has sunk in her esteem and forfeited her confidence. She has been branded with vile names; her son, her eldest hope, is dead—dead through the false accusation which has stuck infamy on his mother's name; and her innocent babe, stained with illegitimacy, disowned and rejected, has been exposed to a cruel death. Can we believe that the mere tardy acknowledgment of her innocence could make amends for wrongs and agonies such as these? or heal a heart which must have bled inwardly, consumed by that untold grief, "which burns worse than tears drown?" Keeping in view the peculiar character of Hermione, such as she is delineated, is she one either to forgive hastily or forget quickly? and though she might, in her solitude, mourn over her repentant husband, would his repentance

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suffice to restore him at once to his place in her heart: to efface from her strong and reflecting mind the recollection of his miserable weakness? or can we fancy this high-souled woman—left childless through the injury which has been inflicted on her, widowed in heart by the unworthiness of him she loved, a spectacle of grief to all—to her husband a continual reproach and humiliation—walking through the parade of royalty in the court which had witnessed her anguish, her shame, her degradation, and her despair? Methinks that the want of feeling, nature, delicacy, and consistency, would lie in such an exhibition as this. In a mind like Hermione's, where the strength of feeling is founded in the power of thought, and where there is little of impulse or imagination,—"the depth, but not the tumult of the soul," [1]—there are but two influences which

[1] ——— The gods approve
The depth, and not the tumult of the soul.
WORDSWORTH.

"Il pouvait y avoir des vagues majestueuses et non de l'orage dans son cœur," was finely observed by Madame de Staël in her maturer years; it would have been true of Hermione at any period of her life.

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predominate over the will,—time and religion. And what then remained, but that, wounded in heart and spirit, she should retire from the world?—not to brood over her wrongs, but to study forgiveness, and wait the fulfilment of the oracle which had promised the termination of her sorrows. Thus a premature reconciliation would not only have been painfully inconsistent with the character; it would also have deprived us of that most beautiful scene, in which Hermione is discovered to her husband as the statue or image of herself. And here we have another instance of that admirable art, with which the dramatic character is fitted to the circumstances in which it is placed: that perfect command over her own feelings, that complete self-possession necessary to this extraordinary situation, is consistent with all that we imagine of Hermione: in any other woman it would be so incredible as to shock all our ideas of probability.

This scene, then, is not only one of the most picturesque and striking instances of stage effect to be found in the ancient or

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modern drama, but by the skilful manner in which it is prepared, it has, wonderful as it appears, all the merit of consistency and truth. The grief, the love, the remorse, and impatience of Leontes, are finely contrasted with the astonishment and admiration of Perdita, who, gazing on the figure of her mother like one entranced, looks as if she were also turned to marble. There is here one little instance of tender remembrance in Leontes, which adds to the charming impression of Hermione's character.

> Chide me, dear stone! that I may say indeed
> Thou art Hermione; or rather thou art she
> In thy not chiding, for she was as tender
> As infancy and grace.
>
> Thus she stood,
> Even with such life of majesty—warm life—
> As now it coldly stands—when first I woo'd her!

The effect produced on the different persons of the drama by this living statue—an effect which at the same moment is, and is *not* illusion—the manner in which the feelings of the spectators become entangled between the conviction of death and the impression

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of life, the idea of a deception and the feeling of a reality; and the exquisite colouring of poetry and touches of natural feeling with which the whole is wrought up, till wonder, expectation, and intense pleasure, hold our pulse and breath suspended on the event, —are quite inimitable.

The expressions used here by Leontes,

> Thus she stood,
> Even with such life of majesty—*warm life.*
> The fixture of her eye has motion in 't.
> And we are mock'd by art!

And by Polixenes,

> The very life seems warm upon her lip,

appear strangely applied to a statue, such as we usually imagine it—of the cold colourless marble; but it is evident that in this scene Hermione personates one of those images or effigies, such as we may see in the old gothic cathedrals, in which the stone, or marble, was coloured after nature. I remember coming suddenly upon one of these effigies, either at Basle or at Fribourg, which made me start; the figure was large

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as life; the drapery of crimson, powdered with stars of gold; the face, and eyes, and hair, tinted after nature, though faded by time; it stood in a gothic niche, over a tomb, as I think, and in a kind of dim uncertain light. It would have been very easy for a living person to represent such an effigy, particularly if it had been painted by that "rare Italian master, Julio Romano,"[1] who, as we are informed, was the reputed author of this wonderful statue.

The moment when Hermione descends from her pedestal to the sound of soft music, and throws herself without speaking into her husband's arms, is one of inexpressible interest. It appears to me that her silence during the whole of this scene (except where she invokes a blessing on her daughter's head) is in the finest taste as a poetical beauty, besides being an admirable trait of character. The misfortunes of Hermione, her long religious seclusion, the wonderful and almost supernatural part she has just enacted, have invested her with such a

[1] Winter's Tale, act. v., scene 11.

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sacred and awful charm, that any words put into her mouth must, I think, have injured the solemn and profound pathos of the situation.

There are several among Shakspeare's characters which exercise a far stronger power over our feelings, our fancy, our understanding, than that of Hermione; but not one,—unless, perhaps, Cordelia,—constructed upon so high and pure a principle. It is the union of gentleness with power which constitutes the perfection of mental grace. Thus among the ancients, with whom the *graces* were also the *charities* (to show, perhaps, that while form alone may constitute beauty, sentiment is necessary to grace), one and the same word signified equally *strength* and *virtue*. This feeling, carried into the fine arts, was the secret of the antique grace—the grace of repose. The same eternal nature—the same sense of immutable truth and beauty, which revealed this sublime principle of art to the ancient Greeks, revealed it to the genius of Shakspeare; and the character of Hermione, in which we have the same largeness of

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conception and delicacy of execution,—the same effect of suffering without passion, and grandeur without effort, is an instance, I think, that he felt within himself, and by intuition, what we study all our lives in the remains of ancient art. The calm, regular, classical beauty of Hermione's character is the more impressive from the wild and gothic accompaniments of her story, and the beautiful relief afforded by the pastoral and romantic grace which is thrown around her daughter Perdita.

The character of Paulina in the Winter's Tale, though it has obtained but little notice, and no critical remark (that I have seen), is yet one of the striking beauties of the play: and it has its moral too. As we see running through the whole universe that principle of contrast which may be called the life of nature, so we behold it everywhere illustrated in Shakspeare: upon this principle he has placed Emilia beside Desdemona, the nurse beside Juliet; the clowns and dairy-maids, and the merry pedlar thief Autolycus round Florizel and Perdita;—and made Paulina the friend of Hermione.

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Paulina does not fill any ostensible office near the person of the queen, but is a lady of high rank in the court—the wife of the Lord Antigones. She is a character strongly drawn from real and common life—a clever, generous, strong-minded, warm-hearted woman, fearless in asserting the truth, firm in her sense of right, enthusiastic in all her affections; quick in thought, resolute in word, and energetic in action; but heedless, hot-tempered, impatient, loud, bold, voluble, and turbulent of tongue; regardless of the feelings of those for whom she would sacrifice her life, and injuring from excess of zeal those whom she most wishes to serve. How many such are there in the world! But Paulina, though a very termagant, is yet a poetical termagant in her way; and the manner in which all the evil and dangerous tendencies of such a temper are placed before us, even while the individual character preserves the strongest hold upon our respect and admiration, forms an impressive lesson, as well as a natural and delightful portrait.

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In the scene, for instance, where she brings the infant before Leontes with the hope of softening him to a sense of his injustice—"an office which," as she observes, "becomes a woman best"—her want of self-government, her bitter, inconsiderate reproaches, only add, as we might easily suppose, to his fury.

PAULINA.

I say I come
From your good queen!

LEONTES.

Good queen!

PAULINA.

Good queen, my lord, good queen: I say good queen;
And would by combat make her good, so were I
A man, the worst about you.

LEONTES.

Force her hence.

PAULINA.

Let him that makes but trifles of his eyes,
First hand me: on mine own accord I'll off;
But first I'll do mine errand. The good queen
(For good she is) hath brought you forth a daughter—
Here 'tis; commends it to your blessing.

LEONTES.

Traitors!
Will you not push her out? Give her the bastard.

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PAULINA.

For ever
Unvenerable be thy hands, if thou
Tak'st up the princess by that forced baseness
Which he has put upon 't!

LEONTES.

He dreads his wife.

PAULINA.

So, I would *you* did; then 't were past all doubt
You'd call your children your's.

LEONTES.

A callat,
Of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband,
And now baits me!—this brat is none of mine.

PAULINA.

It is yours,
And might we lay the old proverb to your charge,
So like you, 'tis the worse.

* * * * *

LEONTES.

A gross hag!
And lozel, thou art worthy to be hanged,
That wilt not stay her tongue.

ANTIGONES.

Hang all the husbands
That cannot do that feat, you'll leave yourself
Hardly one subject.

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LEONTES.

Once more, take her hence.

PAULINA.

A most unworthy and unnatural lord
Can do no more.

LEONTES.

I'll have thee burn'd.

PAULINA.

I care not:
It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burns in 't.

Here, while we honour her courage and her affection, we cannot help regretting her violence. We see, too, in Paulina, what we so often see in real life, that it is not those who are most susceptible in their own temper and feelings who are most delicate and forbearing towards the feelings of others. She does not comprehend, or will not allow for the sensitive weakness of a mind less firmly tempered than her own. There is a reply of Leontes to one of her cutting speeches which is full of feeling, and a lesson to those, who with the best intentions in the world, force the painful truth, like a knife, into the already lacerated heart.

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PAULINA.

If, one by one, you wedded all the world,
Or, from the all that are took something good
To make a perfect woman, she you kill'd
Would be unparallel'd.

LEONTES.

I think so. Kill'd!
She I kill'd? I did so: but thou strik'st me
Sorely, to say I did; it is as bitter
Upon thy tongue, as in my thought. Now, good now,
Say so but seldom.

CLEOMENES.

Not at all, good lady:
You might have spoken a thousand things that would
Have done the time more benefit, and grac'd
Your kindness better.

We can only excuse Paulina by recollecting that it is a part of her purpose to keep alive in the heart of Leontes the remembrance of his queen's perfections, and of his own cruel injustice. It is admirable, too, that Hermione and Paulina, while sufficiently approximated to afford all the pleasure of contrast, are never brought too nearly in contact on the scene or in the dialogue;[1] for this would have been a fault

[1] Only in the last scene, when, with solemnity befitting

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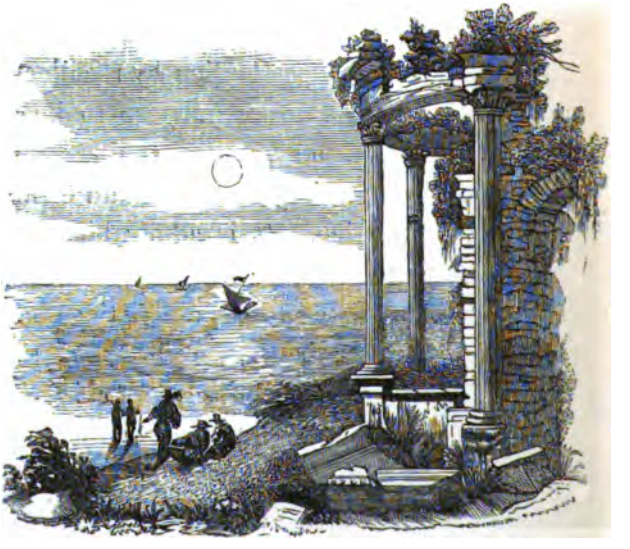
in taste, and have necessarily weakened the effect of both characters:—either the serene grandeur of Hermione would have subdued and overawed the fiery spirit of Paulina, or the impetuous temper of the latter must have disturbed in some respect our impression of the calm, majestic, and somewhat melancholy beauty of Hermione.

the occasion, Paulina invokes the majestic figure to "descend, and be stone no more," and where she presents her daughter to her, "Turn, good lady! our Perdita is found."



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DESDEMONA.

THE character of Hermione is addressed more to the imagination;—that of Desdemona to the feelings. All that can render sorrow majestic is gathered round Hermione; all that can render misery heart-breaking is assembled round Desdemona. The wronged but self-sustained virtue of Hermione commands our veneration; the

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injured and defenceless innocence of Desdemona so wrings the soul, "that all for pity we could die."

Desdemona, as a character, comes nearest to Miranda, both in herself as a woman, and in the perfect simplicity and unity of the delineation; the figures are differently draped—the proportions are the same. There is the same modesty, tenderness, and grace; the same artless devotion in the affections, the same predisposition to wonder, to pity, to admire; the same almost ethereal refinement and delicacy; but all is pure poetic nature within Miranda and around her: Desdemona is more associated with the palpable realities of every-day existence, and we see the forms and habits of society tinting her language and deportment; no two beings can be more alike in character—nor more distinct as individuals.

The love of Desdemona for Othello appears at first such a violation of all probabilities, that her father at once imputes it to magic, "to spells and mixtures powerful o'er the blood."

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She, in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, every thing,
To fall in love with what she feared to look on!

And the devilish malignity of Iago, whose coarse mind cannot conceive an affection founded purely in sentiment, derives from her love itself a strong argument against her.

Ay, there 's the point, as to be bold with you,
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto, we see, in all things nature tends,[1] &c.

Notwithstanding this disparity of age, character, country, complexion, we, who are admitted into the secret, see her love rise naturally and necessarily out of the leading propensities of her nature.

At the period of the story a spirit of wild adventure had seized all Europe. The discovery of both Indies was yet recent; over the shores of the western hemisphere still fable and mystery hung, with all their dim enchantments, visionary terrors, and golden

[1] Act iii., scene 3.

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promises! perilous expeditions and distant voyages were every day undertaken from hope of plunder, or mere love of enterprise; and from these the adventurers returned with tales of "Antres vast and desarts wild —of cannibals that did each other eat—of Anthropophagi, and men whose heads did grow beneath their shoulders." With just such stories did Raleigh and Clifford, and their followers return from the New World: and thus by their splendid or fearful exaggerations, which the imperfect knowledge of those times could not refute, was the passion for the romantic and marvellous nourished at home, particularly among the women. A cavalier of those days had no nearer, no surer way to his mistress's heart, than by entertaining her with these wondrous narratives. What was a general feature of his time, Shakspeare seized and adapted to his purpose with the most exquisite felicity of effect. Desdemona, leaving her household cares in haste, to hang breathless on Othello's tales, was doubtless a picture from the life; and her inex-

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perience and her quick imagination lend it an added propriety: then her compassionate disposition is interested by all the disastrous chances, hair-breadth 'scapes, and moving accidents by flood and field, of which he has to tell; and her exceeding gentleness and timidity, and her domestic turn of mind, render her more easily captivated by the military renown, the valour, and lofty bearing of the noble Moor—

> And to his honours and his valiant parts
> Does she her soul and fortunes consecrate.

The confession and the excuse for her love is well placed in the mouth of Desdemona, while the history of the rise of that love, and of his course of wooing, is, with the most graceful propriety, as far as she is concerned, spoken by Othello, and in her absence. The last two lines summing up the whole—

> She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
> And I loved her that she did pity them—

comprise whole volumes of sentiment and metaphysics.

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Desdemona displays at times a transient energy, arising from the power of affection, but gentleness gives the prevailing tone to the character—gentleness in its excess—gentleness verging on passiveness—gentleness, which not only cannot resent—but cannot resist.

OTHELLO.

Then of so gentle a condition!

IAGO.

Ay! too gentle.

OTHELLO.

Nay, that 's certain.

Here the exceeding softness of Desdemona's temper is turned against her by Iago, so that it suddenly strikes Othello in a new point of view, as the inability to resist temptation; but to us who perceive the character as a whole, this extreme gentleness of nature is yet delineated with such exceeding refinement, that the effect never approaches to feebleness. It is true that *once* her extreme timidity leads her in a moment of confusion and terror to pre-

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varicate about the fatal handkerchief. This handkerchief, in the original story of Cinthio, is merely one of those embroidered handkerchiefs which were as fashionable in Shakspeare's time as in our own; but the minute description of it as "lavorato alla morisco sottilissimamente,"[1] suggested to the poetical fancy of Shakspeare one of the most exquisite and characteristic passages in the whole play. Othello makes poor Desdemona believe that the handkerchief was a talisman.

There 's magic in the web of it.
A sybil, that had numbered in the world
The sun to make two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sew'd the work:
The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,
And it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful
Conserv'd of maidens' hearts.

DESDEMONA.

Indeed! is 't true?

OTHELLO.

Most veritable, therefore look to 't well.

[1] Which being interpreted into modern English, means, I believe, nothing more than that the pattern was what we now call *arabesque*.

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DESDEMONA.

Then would to heaven that I had never seen it!

OTHELLO.

Ha! wherefore!

DESDEMONA.

Why do you speak so startingly and rash?

OTHELLO.

Is 't lost—Is 't gone? Speak, is it out of the way?

DESDEMONA.

Heavens bless us!

OTHELLO.

Say you?

DESDEMONA.

It is not lost—but what an' if it were?

OTHELLO.

Ha!

DESDEMONA.

I say it is not lost.

OTHELLO.

Fetch it, let me see it.

DESDEMONA.

Why so I can, sir, but I will not now, &c.

Desdemona, whose soft credulity, whose turn for the marvellous, whose susceptible imagination had first directed her thoughts

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and affections to Othello, is precisely the woman to be frightened out of her senses by such a tale as this, and betrayed by her fears into a momentary tergiversation. It is most natural in such a being, and shows us that even in the sweetest natures there can be no completeness and consistency without moral energy.[1]

With the most perfect artlessness, she has something of the instinctive, unconscious address of her sex; as when she appeals to her father—

> So much duty as my mother show'd
> To you, preferring you before her father,

[1] There is an incident in the original tale, "Il Moro di Venezia," which could not well be transferred to the drama, but which is very effective, and adds, I think, to the circumstantial horrors of the story. Desdemona does not accidentally drop the handkerchief; it is stolen from her by Iago's little child, an infant of three years old, whom he trains or bribes to the theft. The love of Desdemona for this child, her little playfellow—the pretty description of her taking it in her arms and caressing it, while it profits by its situation to steal the handkerchief from her bosom, are well imagined, and beautifully told; and the circumstance of Iago employing his own innocent child as the instrument of his infernal villany, adds a deeper, and, in truth, an unnecessary touch of the fiend to his fiendish character.

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> So much I challenge, that I may profess
> Due to the Moor, my lord.

And when she is pleading for Cassio—

> What! Michael Cassio!
> That came a wooing with you; and many a time,
> When I have spoken of you disparagingly,
> Hath ta'en your part?

In persons who unite great sensibility and lively fancy, I have often observed this particular species of address, which is always unconscious of itself, and consists in the power of placing ourselves in the position of another, and imagining, rather than perceiving, what is in their hearts. We women have this *address* (if so it can be called) naturally, but I have seldom met with it in men. It is not inconsistent with extreme simplicity of character, and quite distinct from that kind of art which is the result of natural acuteness and habits of observation —quick to perceive the foibles of others, and as quick to turn them to its own purposes; which is always conscious of itself, and if united with strong intellect, seldom

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perceptible to others. In the mention of her mother, and the appeal to Othello's self-love, Desdemona has no design formed on conclusions previously drawn; but her intuitive quickness of feeling, added to her imagination, lead her more safely to the same results, and the distinction is as truly as it is delicately drawn.

When Othello first outrages her in a manner which appears inexplicable, she seeks and finds excuses for him. She is so innocent that not only she cannot believe herself suspected, but she cannot conceive the existence of guilt in others.

> Something, sure, of state,
> Either from Venice, or some unhatch'd practice
> Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
> Hath puddled his clear spirit.
> 'Tis even so—
> Nay, we must think, men are not gods,
> Nor of them look for such observances
> As fit the bridal.

And when the direct accusation of crime is flung on her in the vilest terms, it does not anger but stun her, as if it transfixed her

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whole being; she attempts no reply, no defence; and reproach or resistance never enters her thought.

> Good friend, go to him—for by this light of heaven
> I know not how I lost him: here I kneel:—
> If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,
> Either in discourse of thought or actual deed;
> Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense,
> Delighted them in any other form;
> Or that I do not yet, and ever did,
> And ever will, though he do shake me off
> To beggarly divorcement, love him dearly,
> Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do much,
> And his unkindness may defeat my life,
> But never taint my love.

And there is one stroke of consummate delicacy, surprising, when we remember the latitude of expression prevailing in Shakspeare's time, and which he allowed to his other women generally: she says, on recovering from her stupefaction—

> Am I that name, Iago?
>
> IAGO.
>
> What name, sweet lady?
>
> DESDEMONA.
>
> That, which she says my lord did say I was.

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So completely did Shakspeare enter into the angelic refinement of the character.

Endued with that temper which is the origin of superstition in love as in religion, —which, in fact, makes love itself a religion, she not only does not utter an upbraiding, but nothing that Othello does or says, no outrage no injustice, can tear away the charm with which her imagination had invested him, or impair her faith in his honour; "Would you had never seen him!" exclaims Emilia.

DESDEMONA.

So would not I!—my love doth so approve him,
That even his stubbornness, his checks and frowns
Have grace and favour in them.

There is another peculiarity, which, in reading the play of Othello, we rather feel than perceive: through the whole of the dialogue appropriated to Desdemona, there is not one general observation. Words are with her the vehicle of sentiment, and never of reflection; so that I cannot find throughout a sentence of general application. The

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same remark applies to Miranda: and to no other female character of any importance or interest; not even to Ophelia.

The rest of what I wished to say of Desdemona, has been anticipated by an anonymous critic, and so beautifully, so justly, so eloquently expressed, that I with pleasure erase my own page, to make room for his.

"Othello," observes this writer, "is no love story; all that is below tragedy in the passion of love, is taken away at once, by the awful character of Othello; for such he seems to us to be designed to be. He appears never as a lover, but at once as a husband; and the relation of his love made dignified, as it is a husband's justification of his marriage, is also dignified, as it is a soldier's relation of his stern and perilous life. His love itself, as long as it is happy, is perfectly calm and serene—the protecting tenderness of a husband. It is not till it is disordered, that it appears as a passion: then is shown a power in contention with itself—a mighty being struck with death, and bringing up from all the depths of life convulsions and

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agonies. It is no exhibition of the power of the passion of love, but of the passion of life, vitally wounded, and self overmastering. If Desdemona had been really guilty, the greatness would have been destroyed, because his love would have been unworthy, false. But she is good, and his love is most perfect, just, and good. That a man should place his perfect love on a wretched thing, is miserably debasing, and shocking to thought; but that loving perfectly and well, he should by hellish human circumvention be brought to distrust and dread, and abjure his own perfect love, is most mournful indeed—it is the infirmity of our good nature wrestling in vain with the strong powers of evil. Moreover, he would, had Desdemona been false, have been the mere victim of fate; whereas he is now in a manner his own victim. His happy love was heroic tenderness; his injured love is terrible passion; and disordered power, engendered within itself to its own destruction is the height of all tragedy.

" The character of Othello is perhaps the

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most greatly drawn, the most heroic of any of Shakspeare's actors; but it is, perhaps, that one also of which his reader last acquires the intelligence. The intellectual and warlike energy of his mind—his tenderness of affection—his loftiness of spirit—his frank, generous magnanimity—impetuosity like a thunderbolt—and that dark, fierce flood of boiling passion, polluting even his imagination,—compose a character entirely original, most difficult to delineate, but perfectly delineated."

Emilia in this play is a perfect portrait from common life, a masterpiece in the Flemish style: and though not necessary as a contrast, it cannot be but that the thorough vulgarity, the loose principles of this plebeian woman, united to a high degree of spirit, energetic feeling, strong sense, and low cunning, serve to place in brighter relief the exquisite refinement, the moral grace, the unblemished truth, and the soft submission of Desdemona.

On the other perfections of this tragedy, considered as a production of genius—on

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the wonderful characters of Othello and Iago—on the skill with which the plot is conducted, and its simplicity which a word unravels,[1] and on the overpowering horror of the catastrophe—eloquence and analytical criticism have been exhausted; I will only add, that the source of the pathos throughout—of that pathos which at once softens and deepens the tragic effect—lies in the character of Desdemona. No woman differently constituted could have excited the same intense and painful compassion, without losing something of that exalted charm, which invests her from beginning to end, which we are apt to impute to the interest of the situation, and to the poetical colouring, but which lies, in fact, in the very essence of the character. Desdemona, with all her timid flexibility and soft acquiescence, is not weak; for the negative alone is weak; and

[1] Consequences are so linked together, that the exclamation of Emilia,

O thou dull Moor!—That handkerchief thou speakest of
I found by fortune, and did give my husband!—

is sufficient to reveal to Othello the whole history of his ruin.

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the mere presence of goodness and affection implies in itself a species of power; power without consciousness, power without effort, power with repose—that soul of grace!

I know a Desdemona in real life, one in whom the absence of intellectual power is never felt as a deficiency, nor the absence of energy of will as impairing the dignity, nor the most imperturbable serenity, as a want of feeling: one in whom thoughts appear mere instincts, the sentiment of rectitude supplies the principle, and virtue itself seems rather a necessary state of being, than an imposed law. No shade of sin or vanity has yet stolen over that bright innocence. No discord within has marred the loveliness without—no strife of the factitious world without has disturbed the harmony within. The comprehension of evil appears for ever shut out, as if goodness had converted all things to itself; and all to the pure in heart must necessarily be pure. The impression produced is exactly that of the character of Desdemona; genius is a rare thing, but abstract goodness is rarer. In Desdemona

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we cannot but feel that the slightest manifestation of intellectual power or active will would have injured the dramatic effect. She is a victim consecrated from the first,—"an offering without blemish," alone worthy of the grand final sacrifice; all harmony, all grace, all purity, all tenderness, all truth! But, alas! to see her fluttering like a cherub, in the talons of a fiend!—to see her—O poor Desdemona!

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IMOGEN.

We now come to Imogen. Others of Shakspeare's characters are, as dramatic and poetical conceptions, more striking, more brilliant, more powerful; but of all his women, considered as individuals rather than as heroines, Imogen is the most perfect. Portia

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and Juliet are pictured to the fancy with more force of contrast, more depth of light and shade; Viola and Miranda, with more aërial delicacy of outline; but there is no female portrait that can be compared to Imogen as a woman—none in which so great a variety of tints are mingled together into such perfect harmony. In her we have all the fervour of youthful tenderness, all the romance of youthful fancy, all the enchantment of ideal grace,—the bloom of beauty, the brightness of intellect, and the dignity of rank, taking a peculiar hue from the conjugal character which is shed over all, like a consecration and a holy charm. In Othello and the Winter's Tale, the interest excited for Desdemona and Hermione is divided with others: but in Cymbeline, Imogen is the angel of light, whose lovely presence pervades and animates the whole piece. The character altogether may be pronounced finer, more complex in its elements, and more fully developed in all its parts, than those of Hermione and Desdemona; but the position in which she is placed is not, I

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think, so fine—at least, not so effective, as a tragic situation.

Shakspeare has borrowed the chief circumstances of Imogen's story from one of Boccaccio's tales.[1]

A company of Italian merchants who are assembled in a tavern at Paris, are represented as conversing on the subject of their wives: all of them express themselves with levity, or scepticism, or scorn, on the virtue of women, except a young Genoese merchant, named Bernabo, who maintains, that, by the especial favour of Heaven, he possesses a wife no less chaste than beautiful. Heated by the wine, and excited by the arguments and the coarse raillery of another young merchant, Ambrogiolo, Bernabo proceeds to enumerate the various perfections and accomplishments of Zinevra. He praises her loveliness, her submission, and her discretion —her skill in embroidery, her graceful service, in which the best-trained page of the court could not exceed her; and he adds, as rarer accomplishments, that she could

[1] Decamerone. Novella, 9mo. Giornata, 2do.

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mount a horse, fly a hawk, write and read, and cast up accounts, as well as any merchant of them all. His enthusiasm only excites the laughter and mockery of his companions, particularly of Ambrogiolo, who, by the most artful mixture of contradiction and argument, rouses the anger of Bernabo, and he at length exclaims, that he would willingly stake his life, his head, on the virtue of his wife. This leads to the wager which forms so important an incident in the drama. Ambrogiolo bets one thousand florins of gold against five thousand, that Zinevra, like the rest of her sex, is accessible to temptation—that in less than three months he will undermine her virtue, and bring her husband the most undeniable proofs of her falsehood. He sets off for Genoa, in order to accomplish his purpose; but on his arrival, all that he learns, and all that he beholds with his own eyes, of the discreet and noble character of the lady, make him despair of success by fair means; he therefore has recourse to the basest treachery. By bribing an old

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woman in the service of Zinevra, he is conveyed to her sleeping apartment, concealed in a trunk, from which he issues in the dead of the night; he takes note of the furniture of the chamber, makes himself master of her purse, her morning robe, or cymar, and her girdle, and of a certain mark on her person. He repeats these observations for two nights, and, furnished with these evidences of Zinevra's guilt, he returns to Paris, and lays them before the wretched husband. Bernabo rejects every proof of his wife's infidelity, except that which finally convinces Posthumus. When Ambrogiolo mentions the "mole, cinque-spotted," he stands like one who has received a poniard in his heart; without further dispute he pays down the forfeit, and filled with rage and despair, both at the loss of his money and the falsehood of his wife, he returns towards Genoa: he retires to his country house, and sends a messenger to the city with letters to Zinevra, desiring that she would come and meet him, but with secret orders to the man to despatch her by the way. The ser-

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vant prepares to execute his master's command, but, overcome by her entreaties for mercy, and his own remorse, he spares her life, on condition that she will fly from the country for ever. He then disguises her in his own cloak and cap, and brings back to her husband the assurance that she is killed, and that her body has been devoured by the wolves. In the disguise of a mariner, Zinevra then embarks on board a vessel bound to the Levant, and on arriving at Alexandria, she is taken into the service of the Sultan of Egypt, under the name of Sicurano; she gains the confidence of her master, who, not supecting her sex, sends her as captain of the guard which was appointed for the protection of the merchants at the fair of Acre. Here she accidentally meets Ambrogiolo, and sees in his possession the purse and girdle, which she immediately recognises as her own. In reply to her inquiries, he relates with fiendish exultation the manner in which he had possession of them, and she persuades him to go back with her to Alexandria. She then

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sends a messenger to Genoa in the name of the Sultan, and induces her husband to come and settle in Alexandria. At a proper opportunity, she summons both to the presence of the Sultan, obliges Ambrogiolo to make a full confession of his treachery, and wrings from her husband the avowal of his supposed murder of herself: then falling at the feet of the Sultan discovers her real name and sex, to the great amazement of all. Bernabo is pardoned at the prayer of his wife, and Ambrogiolo is condemned to be fastened to a stake, smeared with honey, and left to be devoured by the flies and locusts. This horrible sentence is executed; while Zinevra, enriched by the presents of the Sultan, and the forfeit wealth of Ambrogiolo, returns with her husband to Genoa, where she lives in great honour and happiness, and maintains her reputation for virtue to the end of her life.

These are the materials from which Shakspeare has drawn the dramatic situation of Imogen. He has also endowed her with several of the qualities which are attributed

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to Zinevra; but for the essential truth and beauty of the individual character, for the sweet colouring of pathos, and sentiment, and poetry, interfused through the whole, he is indebted only to nature and himself.

It would be a waste of words to refute certain critics who have accused Shakspeare of a want of judgment in the adoption of the story; of having transferred the manners of a set of intoxicated merchants and a merchant's wife to heroes and princesses, and of having entirely destroyed the interest of the catastrophe.[1] The truth is, that Shakspeare has wrought out the materials before him with the most luxuriant fancy and the most wonderful skill. As for the various anachronisms, and the confusion of names, dates, and manners, over which Dr. Johnson exults in no measured terms, the confusion is nowhere but in his own heavy obtuseness of sentiment and perception, and his want of poetical faith. Look into the old Italian poets, whom we read continually with still increas-

[1] Vide Dr. Johnson, and Dunlop's History of Fiction.

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ing pleasure; does any one think of sitting down to disprove the existence of Ariodante, king of Scotland? or to prove that the mention of Proteus and Pluto, baptism and the Virgin Mary, in a breath, amounts to an anachronism? Shakspeare, by throwing his story far back into a remote and uncertain age, has blended, by his "own omnipotent will," the marvellous, the heroic, the ideal, and the classical,—the extreme of refinement and the extreme of simplicity,—into one of the loveliest fictions of romantic poetry; and, to use Schlegel's expression, "has made the social manners of the latest times harmonise with heroic deeds, and even with the appearances of the gods."[1]

But, admirable as is the conduct of the whole play, rich in variety of character and in picturesque incident, its chief beauty and interest is derived from Imogen.

When Ferdinand tells Miranda that she was "created of every creature's best," he speaks like a lover, or refers only to her personal charms: the same expression might

[1] See Hazlitt and Schlegel on the catastrophe of Cymbeline.

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be applied critically to the character of Imogen; for, as the portrait of Miranda is produced by resolving the female character into its original elements, so that of Imogen unites the greatest number of those qualities which we imagine to constitute excellence in woman.

Imogen, like Juliet, conveys to our mind the impression of extreme simplicity in the midst of the most wonderful complexity. To conceive her aright, we must take some peculiar tint from many characters, and so mingle them, that, like the combination of hues in a sunbeam, the effect shall be as one to the eye. We must imagine something of the romantic enthusiasm of Juliet, of the truth and constancy of Helen, of the dignified purity of Isabel, of the tender sweetness of Viola, of the self-possession and intellect of Portia—combined together so equally and so harmoniously, that we can scarcely say that one quality predominates over the other. But Imogen is less imaginative than Juliet, less spirited and intellectual than Portia, less serious than Helen and Isabel;

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her dignity is not so imposing as that of Hermione, it stands more on the defensive; her submission, though unbounded, is not so passive as that of Desdemona;—and thus, while she resembles each of these characters individually, she stands wholly distinct from all.

It is true that the conjugal tenderness of Imogen is at once the chief subject of the drama, and the pervading charm of her character; but it is not true, I think, that she is merely interesting from her tenderness and constancy to her husband. We are so completely let into the essence of Imogen's nature, that we feel as if we had known and loved her before she was married to Posthumus, and that her conjugal virtues are a charm superadded, like the colour laid upon a beautiful groundwork. Neither does it appear to me, that Posthumus is unworthy of Imogen, or only interesting on Imogen's account. His character, like those of all the other persons of the drama, is kept subordinate to hers: but this could not be otherwise, for she is the proper subject—

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the heroine of the poem. Every thing is done to ennoble Posthumus, and justify her love for him; and though we certainly approve him more for her sake than for his own, we are early prepared to view him with Imogen's eyes; and not only excuse, but sympathize in her admiration of one

> Who sat 'mongst men like a descended god.
> * * * *
> Who lived in court, which it is rare to do,
> Most praised, most loved:
> A sample to the youngest; to the more mature,
> A glass that feated them.

And with what beauty and delicacy is her conjugal and matronly character discriminated! Her love for her husband is as deep as Juliet's for her lover, but without any of that headlong vehemence, that fluttering amid hope, fear, and transport—that giddy intoxication of heart and sense, which belongs to the novelty of passion, which we feel once, and but once, in our lives. We see her love for Posthumus acting upon her mind with the force of an habitual feeling, heightened by enthusiastic passion, and

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hallowed by the sense of duty. She asserts and justifies her affection with energy indeed, but with a calm and wife-like dignity—

CYMBELINE.

Thou took'st a beggar, would'st have made my throne
A seat for baseness.

IMOGEN.

No, I rather added a lustre to it.

CYMBELINE.

O thou vile one!

IMOGEN.

Sir,
It is your fault that I have loved Posthumus;
You bred him as my playfellow, and he is
A man worth any woman; overbuys me,
Almost the sum he pays.

Compare also, as examples of the most delicate discrimination of character and feeling, the parting scene between Imogen and Posthumus, that between Romeo and Juliet, and that between Troilus and Cressida; compare the confiding matronly tenderness, the deep but resigned sorrow of Imogen, with the despairing agony of Juliet, and the petulant grief of Cressida.

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When Posthumus is driven into exile, he comes to take a last farewell of his wife:

IMOGEN.

My dearest husband,
I something fear my father's wrath, but nothing
(Always reserved my holy duty) what
His rage can do on me. You must be gone,
And I shall here abide the hourly shot
Of angry eyes: not comforted to live,
But that there is this jewel in the world
That I may see again.

POSTHUMUS.

My queen! my mistress!
O, lady, weep no more! lest I give cause
To be suspected of more tenderness
Than doth become a man. I will remain
The loyal'st husband that did e'er plight troth

* * * *

Should we be taking leave
As long a term as yet we have to live,
The loathness to depart would grow—Adieu!

IMOGEN.

Nay, stay a little:
Were you but riding forth to air yourself,
Such parting were too petty. Look here, love,
This diamond was my mother's; take it, heart;
But keep it till you woo another wife,
When Imogen is dead!

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Imogen, in whose tenderness there is nothing jealous or fantastic, does not seriously apprehend that her husband will woo another wife when she is dead. It is one of those fond fancies which women are apt to express in moments of feeling, merely for the pleasure of hearing a protestation to the contrary. When Posthumus leaves her, she does not burst forth in eloquent lamentation; but that silent, stunning, overwhelming sorrow, which renders the mind insensible to all things else, is represented with equal force and simplicity.

IMOGEN.

There cannot be a pinch in death
More sharp than this is.

CYMBELINE.

O disloyal thing,
That should'st repair my youth; thou heapest
A year's age on me!

IMOGEN.

I beseech you, sir,
Harm not yourself with your vexation; I
Am senseless of your wrath; a touch more rare[1]
Subdues all pangs, all fears.

[1] More rare—*i. e.*, more exquisitely poignant.

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CYMBELINE.

Past grace? obedience?

IMOGEN.

Past hope, and in despair—that way past grace.

In the same circumstances, the impetuous excited feelings of Juliet, and her vivid imagination, lend something far more wildly agitated, more intensely poetical and passionate to her grief.

JULIET.

Art thou gone so? My love, my lord, my friend!
I must hear from thee every day i' the hour,
For in a minute there are many days—
O by this count I shall be much in years,
Ere I again behold my Romeo!

ROMEO.

Farewell! I will omit no opportunity
That may convey my greetings, love, to thee.

JULIET.

O! think'st thou we shall ever meet again?

ROMEO.

I doubt it not; and all these woes shall serve
For sweet discourses in our time to come.

JULIET.

O God! I have an ill-divining soul:

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Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb:
Either my eye-sight fails, or thou look'st pale.

We have no sympathy with the pouting disappointment of Cressida, which is just like that of a spoilt child which has lost its sugar-plum, without tenderness, passion, or poetry: and, in short, perfectly characteristic of that vain, fickle, dissolute, heartless woman,—"unstable as water."

CRESSIDA.

And is it true that I must go from Troy?

TROILUS.

A hateful truth.

CRESSIDA.

What, and from Troilus too?

TROILUS.

From Troy and Troilus.

CRESSIDA.

Is it possible?

TROILUS.

And suddenly.

CRESSIDA.

I must then to the Greeks?

TROILUS.

No remedy.

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CRESSIDA.

A woeful Cressid 'mongst the merry Greeks!
When shall we see again?

TROILUS.

Hear me, my love. Be thou but true of heart—

CRESSIDA.

I true! How now? what wicked deem is this?

TROILUS.

Nay, we must use expostulation kindly,
For it is parting from us;
I speak not, be thou true, as fearing thee;
For I will throw my glove to Death himself,
That there's no maculation in thy heart:
But be thou true, say I, to fashion in
My sequent protestation. Be thou true,
And I will see thee.

CRESSIDA.

O heavens! be true again—
O heavens! you love me not.

TROILUS.

Die I a villain, then!
In this I do not call your faith in question,
So mainly as my merit—
——But be not tempted.

CRESSIDA.

Do you think I will?

* * * *

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In the eagerness of Imogen to meet her husband there is all a wife's fondness, mixed up with the breathless hurry arising from a sudden and joyful surprise; but nothing of the picturesque eloquence, the ardent, exuberant, Italian imagination of Juliet, who, to gratify her impatience, would have her heralds thoughts;—press into her service the nimble-pinioned doves, and wind-swift Cupids,—change the course of nature, and lash the steeds of Phœbus to the west. Imogen only thinks "one score of miles, 'twixt sun and sun," slow travelling for a lover, and wishes for a horse with wings—

O for a horse with wings! Hear'st thou, Pisanio?
He is at Milford Haven. Read, and tell me
How far 'tis thither. If one of mean affairs
May plod it in a week, why may not I
Glide thither in a day? Then, true Pisanio
(Who long'st like me, to see thy lord—who long'st—
O let me bate, but not like me—yet long'st,
But in a fainter kind—O not like me,
For mine's beyond beyond), say, and speak thick—
(Love's counsellor should fill the bores of hearing
To the smothering of the sense)—how far is it

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To this same blessed Milford? And by the way,
Tell me how Wales was made so happy, as
To inherit such a haven. But, first of all,
How we may steal from hence; and for the gap
That we shall make in time, from our hence going
And our return, to excuse. But first, how get hence:
Why should excuse be born, or e'er begot?
We'll talk of that hereafter. Pr'ythee speak,
How many score of miles may we well ride
'Twixt hour and hour?

PISANIO.

One score, 'twixt sun and sun,
Madam, 's enough for you; and too much too.

IMOGEN.

Why, one that rode to his execution, man,
Could never go so slow!

There are two or three other passages bearing on the conjugal tenderness of Imogen, which must be noticed for the extreme intensity of the feeling, and the unadorned elegance of the expression.

I would thou grew'st unto the shores o' the haven
And question'dst every sail: if he should write,
And I not have it, 'twere a paper lost
As offered mercy is. What was the last
That he spake to thee?

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PISANIO.

'Twas, His queen! his queen!

IMOGEN.

Then wav'd his handkerchief?

PISANIO.

And kiss'd it, madam.

IMOGEN.

Senseless linen! happier therein than I!—
And that was all?

PISANIO.

No, madam; for so long
As he could make me with this eye or ear
Distinguish him from others, he did keep
The deck, with glove, or hat, or handkerchief
Still waving, as the fits and stirs of his mind
Could best express how slow his soul sail'd on,
How swift his ship.

IMOGEN.

Thou should'st have made him
As little as a crow, or less, ere left
To after-eye him.

PISANIO.

Madam, so I did.

IMOGEN.

I would have broke my eye-strings; cracked them, but
To look upon him; till the diminution
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle;
Nay, followed him, till he had melted from

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The smallness of a gnat to air; and then
Have turn'd mine eye, and wept.

Two little incidents, which are introduced with the most unobtrusive simplicity, convey the strongest impression of her tenderness for her husband, and with that perfect unconsciousness on her part, which adds to the effect. Thus, when she has lost her bracelet—

Go, bid my woman
Search for a jewel, that too casually,
Hath left my arm. It was thy master's: 'shrew me,
If I would lose it for a revenue
Of any king in Europe. I do think
I saw 't this morning; confident I am,
Last night 'twas on mine arm—*I kiss'd it.*
I hope it has not gone to tell my lord
That I kiss aught but he.

It has been well observed, that our consciousness that the bracelet is really gone to bear false witness against her, adds an inexpressibly touching effect to the simplicity and tenderness of the sentiment.

And again, when she opens her bosom to meet the death to which her husband

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has doomed her, she finds his letters preserved next her heart.

> What's here?
> The letters of the loyal Leonatus?—
> Soft, we'll no defence.

The scene in which Posthumus stakes his ring on the virtue of his wife, and gives Iachimo permission to tempt her, is taken from the story. The baseness and folly of such conduct have been justly censured; but Shakspeare, feeling that Posthumus needed every excuse, has managed the quarrelling scene between him and Iachimo with the most admirable skill. The manner in which his high spirit is gradually worked up by the taunts of this Italian fiend, is contrived with far more probability, and much less coarseness, than in the original tale. In the end he is not the challenger, but the challenged; and could hardly (except on a moral principle, much too refined for those rude times) have declined the wager without compromising his

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own courage, and his faith in the honour of Imogen.

IACHIMO.

I durst attempt it against any lady in the world.

POSTHUMUS.

You are a great deal abused in too bold a persuasion; and I doubt not you sustain what you're worthy of, by your attempt.

IACHIMO.

What's that?

POSTHUMUS.

A repulse: though your *attempt*, as you call it, deserve more—a punishment too.

PHILARIO.

Gentlemen, enough of this. It came in too suddenly; let it die as it was born, and I pray you be better acquainted.

IACHIMO.

Would I had put my estate and my neighbour's on the approbation of what I have said!

POSTHUMUS.

What lady would you choose to assail?

IACHIMO.

Yours, whom in constancy you think stands so safe.

In the interview between Imogen and

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Iachimo, he does not begin his attack on her virtue by a direct accusation against Posthumus; but by dark hints and half-uttered insinuations, such as Iago uses to madden Othello, he intimates that her husband, in his absence from her, has betrayed her love and truth, and forgotten her in the arms of another. All that Imogen says in this scene is comprised in a few lines—a brief question, or a more brief remark. The proud and delicate reserve with which she veils the anguish she suffers, is inimitably beautiful. The strongest expression of reproach he can draw from her, is only, "My lord, I fear, has forgot Britain." When he continues in the same strain, she exclaims in an agony, "Let me hear no more." When he urges her to revenge, she asks, with all the simplicity of virtue, "How should I be revenged?" And when he explains to her how she is to be avenged, her sudden burst of indignation, and her immediate perception of his treachery, and the motive for it, are powerfully fine: it is not only the anger of a woman whose deli-

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cacy has been shocked, but the spirit of a princess insulted in her court.

> Away! I do condemn mine ears, that have
> So long attended thee. If thou wert honourable,
> Thou would'st have told this tale for virtue, not
> For such an end thou seek'st, as base as strange.
> Thou wrong'st a gentleman, who is as far
> From thy report as thou from honour; and
> Solicit'st here a lady that disdains
> Thee and the devil alike.

It has been remarked that "her readiness to pardon Iachimo's false imputation, and his designs against herself, is a good lesson to prudes, and may show that where there is a real attachment to virtue, there is no need of an outrageous antipathy to vice."[1]

This is true; but can we fail to perceive that the instant and ready forgiveness of Imogen is accounted for, and rendered more graceful and characteristic by the very means which Iachimo employs to win it? He pours forth the most enthusiastic praises of her husband, professes that he merely made this trial of her out of his exceeding

[1] Characters of Shakspeare's Plays.

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love for Posthumus, and she is pacified at once; but, with exceeding delicacy of feeling, she is represented as maintaining her dignified reserve and her brevity of speech to the end of the scene.[1]

We must also observe how beautifully the character of Imogen is distinguished from those of Desdemona and Hermione. When she is made acquainted with her husband's cruel suspicions, we see in her deportment neither the meek submission of the former, nor the calm resolute dignity of the latter. The first effect produced on her by her husband's letter is conveyed to the fancy by the exclamation of Pisanio, who is gazing on her as she reads:

> What shall I need to draw my sword? The paper
> Has cut her throat already! No, 't is slander,
> Whose edge is sharper than the sword!

And in her first exclamations we trace, besides astonishment and anguish, and the acute sense of the injustice inflicted on her,

[1] Vide act i., scene 7.

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a flash of indignant spirit, which we do not find in Desdemona or Hermione.

> False to his bed!—What is it to be false?
> To lie in watch there, and to think of him?
> To weep 'twixt clock and clock? If sleep charge nature,
> To break it with a fearful dream of him,
> And cry myself awake?—that 's false to his bed,
> Is it?

This is followed by that affecting lamentation over the falsehood and injustice of her husband, in which she betrays no atom of jealousy or wounded self-love, but observes in the extremity of her anguish, that after *his* lapse from truth, "all good seeming would be discredited," and she then resigns herself to his will with the most entire submission.

In the original story, Zinevra prevails on the servant to spare her, by her exclamations and entreaties for mercy. "The lady, seeing the poniard, and hearing those words, exclaimed in terror, 'Alas! have pity on me for the love of heaven! do not become the slayer of one who never of-

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fended thee, only to pleasure another. God, who knows all things, knows that I have never done that which could merit such a reward from my husband's hand.'"

Now let us turn to Shakspeare. Imogen says,

> Come, fellow, be thou honest;
> Do thou thy master's bidding: when thou seest him,
> A little witness my obedience. Look!
> I draw the sword myself; take it, and hit
> The innocent mansion of my love, my heart.
> Fear not; 't is empty of all things but grief:
> Thy master is not there, who was, indeed,
> The riches of it. Do his bidding; strike!

The devoted attachment of Pisanio to his royal mistress, all through the piece, is one of those side touches by which Shakspeare knew how to give additional effect to his characters.

Cloten is odious;[1] but we must not over-

[1] The character of Cloten has been pronounced by some unnatural, by others inconsistent, and by others obsolete. The following passage occurs in one of Miss Seward's letters, vol. iii., p. 246:—"It is curious that Shakspeare should, in so singular a character as Cloten, have given the exact prototype of a being whom I once knew. The unmeaning

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look the peculiar fitness and propriety of his character, in connexion with that of Imogen. He is precisely the kind of man who would be most intolerable to such a woman. He is a fool—so is Slender, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek: but the folly of Cloten is not only ridiculous, but hateful; it arises not so much from a want of understanding as a total want of heart; it is the perversion of sentiment, rather than the deficiency of intellect; he has occasional gleams of sense, but never a touch of feeling. Imogen describes herself not only as "sprighted with a fool," but as "frighted and anger'd worse." No other fool but Cloten—a compound of the booby and the villain—could excite in such a mind as Imogen's the same mixture of terror,

frown of countenance, the shuffling gait, the burst of voice, the bustling insignificance, the fever and ague fits of valour, the froward tetchiness, the unprincipled malice, and, what is more curious, those occasional gleams of good sense amidst the floating clouds of folly which generally darkened and confused the man's brain, and which, in the character of Cloten, we are apt to impute to a violation of unity in character; but in the some-time Captain C——, I saw that the portrait of Cloten was not out of nature."

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contempt, and abhorrence. The stupid, obstinate malignity of Cloten, and the wicked machinations of the queen—

> A father cruel, and a step-dame false,
> A foolish suitor to a wedded lady—

justify whatever might need excuse in the conduct of Imogen—as her concealed marriage and her flight from her father's court—and serve to call out several of the most beautiful and striking parts of her character: particularly that decision and vivacity of temper, which in her harmonize so beautifully with exceeding delicacy, sweetness, and submission.

In the scene with her detested suitor, there is at first a careless majesty of disdain, which is admirable.

> I am much sorry, sir,
> You put me to forget a lady's manners,
> By being so verbal;[1] and learn now, for all,
> That I, which know my heart, do here pronounce,
> By the very truth of it, I care not for you,
> And am so near the lack of charity,

[1] i. e., *full of words.*

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(T' accuse myself,) I hate you; which I had rather
You felt, than make 't my boast.

But when he dares to provoke her, by reviling the absent Posthumus, her indignation heightens her scorn, and her scorn sets a keener edge on her indignation.

CLOTEN.

For the contract you pretend with that base wretch,
One bred of alms, and fostered with cold dishes,
With scraps o' the court: it is no contract, none.

IMOGEN.

Profane fellow!
Wert thou the son of Jupiter, and no more,
But what thou art, besides, thou wert too base
To be his groom; thou wert dignified enough,
Even to the point of envy, if 't were made
Comparative for your virtues, to be styl'd
The under hangman of his kingdom; and hated
For being preferr'd so well.

He never can meet more mischance than come
To be but nam'd of thee. His meanest garment
That ever hath but clipp'd his body, is dearer
In my respect, than all the hairs above thee,
Were they all made such men.

One thing more must be particularly remarked, because it serves to individualize the character, from the beginning to

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the end of the poem. We are constantly sensible that Imogen, besides being a tender and devoted woman, is a princess and a beauty, at the same time that she is ever superior to her position and her external charms. There is, for instance, a certain airy majesty of deportment—a spirit of accustomed command breaking out every now and then—the dignity, without the assumption of rank and royal birth, which is apparent in the scene with Cloten and elsewhere: and we have not only a general impression that Imogen, like other heroines, is beautiful, but the peculiar style and character of her beauty is placed before us: we have an image of the most luxuriant loveliness, combined with exceeding delicacy, and even fragility of person: of the most refined elegance, and the most exquisite modesty, set forth in one or two passages of description; as when Iachimo is contemplating her asleep:

> Cytherea,
> How bravely thou becom'st thy bed! fresh lily,
> And whiter than the sheets.

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'Tis her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus. The flame o' the taper
Bows toward her; and would underpeep her lids
To see the enclos'd lights, now canopied
Under those windows, white and azure, lac'd
With blue of heaven's own tinct!

The preservation of her feminine character under her masculine attire; her delicacy, her modesty, and her timidity, are managed with the same perfect consistency and unconscious grace as in Viola. And we must not forget that her "neat cookery," which is so prettily eulogised by Guiderius—

He cuts out roots in characters,
And sauc'd our broths, as Juno had been sick,
And he her dieter,

formed part of the education of a princess in those remote times.

Few reflections of a general nature are put into the mouth of Imogen; and what she says is more remarkable for sense, truth, and tender feeling, than for wit, or wisdom, or power of imagination. The following little touch of poetry reminds us of Juliet:

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Ere I could
Give him that parting kiss, which I had set
Between two charming words, comes in my father;
And, like the tyrannous breathing of the north,
Shakes all our buds from growing.

Her exclamation on opening her husband's letter, reminds us of the profound and thoughtful tenderness of Helen:

O learned indeed were that astronomer
That knew the stars, as I his characters!
He'd lay the future open.

The following are more in the manner of Isabel—

Most miserable
Is the desire that 's glorious: bless'd be those,
How mean soe'er, that have their honest wills,
That seasons comfort.

Against self-slaughter
There is a prohibition so divine
That cravens my weak hand.

Thus may poor fools
Believe false teachers; though those that are betray'd
Do feel the reason sharply, yet the traitor

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Stands in worse case of woe.
Are we not brothers?

So man and man should be;
But clay and clay differs in dignity,
Whose dust is both alike.

Will poor folks lie
That have afflictions on them, knowing 'tis
A punishment or trial? Yes: no wonder,
When rich ones scarce tell true: to lapse in fulness
Is sorer than to lie for need; and falsehood
Is worse in kings than beggars.

The sentence which follows, and which I believe has become proverbial, has much of the manner of Portia, both in the thought and the expression:—

Hath Britain all the sun that shines? Day, night,
Are they not but in Britain? I' the world's volume
Our Britain seems as of it, but not in it;
In a great pool, a swan's nest; pr'ythee, think
There 's livers out of Britain.

* * * *

The catastrophe of this play has been much admired for the peculiar skill with which all the various threads of interest are gathered together at last, and entwined

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with the destiny of Imogen. It may be added, that one of its chief beauties is the manner in which the character of Imogen is not only preserved, but rises upon us to the conclusion with added grace: her instantaneous forgiveness of her husband before he even asks it, when she flings herself at once into his arms,

> Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?

and her magnanimous reply to her father, when he tells her, that by the discovery of her two brothers she has lost a kingdom—

> No—I have gain'd two worlds by it—

clothing a noble sentiment in a noble image, give the finishing touches of excellence to this most enchanting portrait.

On the whole, Imogen is a lovely compound of goodness, truth, and affection, with just so much of passion and intellect and poetry, as serve to lend to the picture that power and glowing richness of effect which it would otherwise have wanted; and of her it might be said, if we could

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condescend to quote from any other poet with Shakspeare open before us, that "her person was a paradise, and her soul the cherub to guard it."[1]

[1] Dryden.

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CORDELIA.

THERE is in the beauty of Cordelia's character an effect too sacred for words, and almost too deep for tears; within her heart is a fathomless well of purest affection, but its waters sleep in silence and obscurity,—never failing in their depth and never overflowing in their fulness. Every thing in her seems to lie beyond our view, and affects us in a manner which we feel rather

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than perceive. The character appears to have no surface, no salient points upon which the fancy can readily seize: there is little external development of intellect, less of passion, and still less of imagination. It is completely made out in the course of a few scenes, and we are surprised to find that in those few scenes there is matter for a life of reflection, and materials enough for twenty heroines. If Lear be the grandest of Shakspeare's tragedies, Cordelia in herself, as a human being, governed by the purest and holiest impulses and motives, the most refined from all dross of selfishness and passion, approaches near to perfection; and in her adaptation, as a dramatic personage, to a determinate plan of action, may be pronounced altogether perfect. The character, to speak of it critically as a poetical conception, is not, however, to be comprehended at once, or easily; and in the same manner Cordelia, as a woman, is one whom we must have loved before we could have known her, and known her long before we could have known her truly.

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Most people, I believe, have heard the story of the young German artist Müller, who, while employed in copying and engraving Raffaelle's Madonna del Sisto, was so penetrated by its celestial beauty, so distrusted his own power to do justice to it, that between admiration and despair he fell into a sadness; thence through the usual gradations, into a melancholy, thence into madness; and died just as he had put the finishing stroke to his own matchless work, which had occupied him for eight years. With some slight tinge of this concentrated kind of enthusiasm I have learned to contemplate the character of Cordelia; I have looked into it till the revelation of its hidden beauty, and an intense feeling of the wonderful genius which created it, have filled me at once with delight and despair.

Like poor Müller, but with more reason, I *do* despair of ever conveying, through a different and inferior medium, the impression made on my own mind to the mind of another.

Schlegel, the most eloquent of critics,

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concludes his remarks on King Lear with these words: "Of the heavenly beauty of the soul of Cordelia, I will not venture to speak." Now if I attempt what Schlegel and others have left undone, it is because I feel that this general acknowledgment of her excellence can neither satisfy those who have studied the character, nor convey a just conception of it to the mere reader. Amid the awful, the overpowering interest of the story, amid the terrible convulsions of passion and suffering, and pictures of moral and physical wretchedness which harrow up the soul, the tender influence of Cordelia, like that of a celestial visitant, is felt and acknowledged without being quite understood. Like a soft star that shines for a moment from behind a stormy cloud, and the next is swallowed up in tempest and darkness, the impression it leaves is beautiful and deep,—but vague. Speak of Cordelia to a critic or to a general reader, all agree in the beauty of the portrait, for all must feel it: but when we come to details, I have heard more various and oppo-

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site opinions relative to her than any other of Shakspeare's characters—a proof of what I have advanced in the first instance, that from the simplicity with which the character is dramatically treated, and the small space it occupies, few are aware of its internal power, or its wonderful depth of purpose.

It appears to me that the whole character rests upon the two sublimest principles of human action, the love of truth and the sense of duty; but these, when they stand alone (as in the Antigone), are apt to strike us as severe and cold. Shakspeare has, therefore, wreathed them round with the dearest attributes of our feminine nature, the power of feeling and inspiring affection. The first part of the play shows us how Cordelia is loved, the second part how she can love. To her father she is the object of a secret preference; his agony at her supposed unkindness draws from him the confession, that he had loved her most, and "thought to set his rest on her kind nursery." Till then she had been "his

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best object, the argument of his praise, balm of his age, most best, most dearest!" The faithful and worthy Kent is ready to brave death and exile in her defence: and afterwards a farther impression of her benign sweetness is conveyed in a simple and beautiful manner, when we are told that "since the lady Cordelia went to France, her father's poor fool had much pined away." We have her sensibility "when patience and sorrow strove which should express her goodliest: and all her filial tenderness when she commits her poor father to the care of the physician, when she hangs over him as he is sleeping, and kisses him as she contemplates the wreck of grief and majesty.

O my dear father! restoration hang
Its medicine on my lips: and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!
Had you not been their father, these white flakes
Had challenged pity of them! Was this a face
To be exposed against the warring winds,
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder,

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In the most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick cross lightning? to watch, (poor perdu!)
With thin helm? mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire.

Her mild magnanimity shines out in her farewell to her sisters, of whose real character she is perfectly aware:

Ye jewels of our father! with washed eyes
Cordelia leaves you! I know ye what ye are,
And like a sister, am most loath to call
Your faults as they are nam'd. Use well our father,
To your professed bosoms I commit him.
But yet, alas! stood I within his grace,
I would commend him to a better place;
So farewell to you both.

GONERIL.

Prescribe not us our duties!

The modest pride with which she replies to the Duke of Burgundy is admirable; this whole passage is too illustrative of the peculiar character of Cordelia, as well as too exquisite to be mutilated.

I yet beseech your majesty
(If, for I want that glib and oily heart,

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To speak and purpose not, since what I well intend
I'll do 't before I speak), that you make known,
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
No unchaste action, or dishonoured step
That hath deprived me of your grace and favour;
But even for want of that, for which I am richer;
A still soliciting eye, and such a tongue
I am glad I have not, tho' not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.

LEAR.

Better thou
Hadst not been born, than not to have pleased me better.

FRANCE.

Is it but this? a tardiness of nature,
That often leaves the history unspoke
Which it intends to do?—My lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady? love is not love
When it is mingled with respects that stand
Aloof from the entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.

BURGUNDY.

Royal Lear,
Give but that portion which yourself proposed,
And here I take Cordelia by the hand
Duchess of Burgundy.

LEAR.

Nothing: I have sworn; I am firm.

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BURGUNDY.

I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father
That you must lose a husband.

CORDELIA.

Peace be with Burgundy!
Since that respects of fortune are his love,
I shall not be his wife.

FRANCE.

Fairest Cordelia! thou art more rich, being poor,
Most choice, forsaken, and most lov'd, despised!
Thee and thy virtues I here seize upon.

She takes up arms, "not for ambition, but a dear father's right." In her speech after her defeat, we have a calm fortitude and elevation of soul, arising from the consciousness of duty, and lifting her above all consideration of self. She observes,

We are not the first
Who with best meaning have incurred the worst!

She thinks and fears only for her father.

For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;
Myself would else out-frown false fortune's frown.

To complete the picture, her very voice

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is characteristic, "ever soft, gentle, and low; an excellent thing in woman."

But it will be said that the qualities here exemplified—as sensibility, gentleness, magnanimity, fortitude, generous affection—are qualities which belong, in their perfection, to others of Shakspeare's characters—to Imogen, for instance, who unites them all; and yet Imogen and Cordelia are wholly unlike each other. Even though we should reverse their situations, and give to Imogen the filial devotion of Cordelia, and to Cordelia the conjugal virtues of Imogen, still they would remain perfectly distinct as women. What is it, then, which lends to Cordelia that peculiar and individual truth of character which distinguishes her from every other human being?

It is a natural reserve, a tardiness of disposition, "which often leaves the history unspoke which it intends to do;" a subdued quietness of deportment and expression, a veiled shyness thrown over all her emotions, her language and her manner; making the outward demonstration inva-

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riably fall short of what we know to be the feeling within. Not only is the portrait singularly beautiful and interesting in itself, but the conduct of Cordelia, and the part which she bears in the beginning of the story, is rendered consistent and natural by the wonderful truth and delicacy with which this peculiar disposition is sustained throughout the play.

In early youth, and more particularly if we are gifted with a lively imagination, such a character as that of Cordelia is calculated above every other to impress and captivate us. Anything like mystery, anything withheld or withdrawn from our notice, seizes on our fancy by awakening our curiosity. Then we are won more by what we half perceive and half create, than by what is openly expressed and freely bestowed. But this feeling is a part of our young life: when time and years have chilled us, when we can no longer afford to send our souls abroad, nor from our own superfluity of life and sensibility spare the materials out of which we build a

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shrine for our idol—then do we seek, we ask, we thirst for that warmth of frank, confiding tenderness, which revives in us the withered affections and feelings, buried but not dead. Then the excess of love is welcomed, not repelled: it is gracious to us as the sun and dew to the seared and riven trunk, with its few green leaves. Lear is old—"fourscore and upwards"—but we see what he has been in former days: the ardent passions of youth have turned to rashness and wilfulness: he is long passed that age when we are more blessed in what we bestow than in what we receive. When he says to his daughters, "I gave ye all!" we feel that he requires all in return, with a jealous, restless, exacting affection which defeats its own wishes. How many such are there in the world! How many to sympathize with the fiery, fond old man, when he shrinks as if petrified from Cordelia's quiet calm reply!

LEAR.

Now our joy,
Although the last not least—

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What can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters'? Speak!

CORDELIA.

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR.

Nothing!

CORDELIA.

Nothing.

LEAR.

Nothing can come of nothing: speak again!

CORDELIA.

Unhappy that I am! I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more, nor less.

Now this is perfectly natural. Cordelia has penetrated the vile characters of her sisters. Is it not obvious that in proportion as her own mind is pure and guileless, she must be disgusted with their gross hypocrisy and exaggeration, their empty protestations, their "plaited cunning;" and would retire from all competition with what she so disdains and abhors,—even into the oppo-

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site extreme? In such a case, as she says herself—

> What should Cordelia do?—love and be silent?

For the very expressions of Lear—

> What can you say to draw
> A third more opulent than your sisters'?

are enough to strike dumb for ever a generous, delicate, but shy disposition, such as is Cordelia's, by holding out a bribe for professions.

If Cordelia were not thus portrayed, this deliberate coolness would strike us as verging on harshness or obstinacy; but it is beautifully represented as a certain modification of character, the necessary result of feelings habitually, if not naturally, repressed: and through the whole play we trace the same peculiar and individual disposition—the same absence of all display—the same sobriety of speech veiling the most profound affections—the same quiet steadiness of purpose—the same shrinking from all exhibition of emotion.

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"Tous les sentimens naturels ont leur pudeur," was a *vivâ voce* observation of Madame de Staël, when disgusted by the sentimental affection of her imitators. This "pudeur," carried to an excess, appears to me the peculiar characteristic of Cordelia. Thus, in the description of her deportment when she receives the letter of the Earl of Kent, informing her of the cruelty of her sisters and the wretched condition of Lear, we seem to have her before us:

KENT.

Did your letters pierce the queen to any demonstration of grief?

GENTLEMAN.

Ay, sir, she took them, and read them in my presence;
And now and then an ample tear stole down
Her delicate cheek. It seemed she was a queen
Over her passion; who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king over her.

KENT.

O then it moved her!

GENTLEMAN.

Not to a rage.
Faith, once or twice she heaved the name of father

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Pantingly forth, as if it pressed her heart,
Cried, *Sisters! sisters! Shame of ladies! Sisters!*
What, i' the storm! i' the night?
Let pity not be believed! Then she shook
The holy water from her heavenly eyes;

* * * * *

Then away she started,
To deal with grief alone.

Here the last line—the image brought before us of Cordelia starting away from observation, "to deal with grief alone," is as exquisitely beautiful as it is characteristic.

But all the passages hitherto quoted must yield in beauty and power to that scene, in which her poor father recognises her, and in the intervals of distraction, asks forgiveness of his wronged child. The subdued pathos and simplicity of Cordelia's character, her quiet but intense feeling, the misery and humiliation of the bewildered old man, are brought before us in so few words, and at the same time sustained with such a deep intuitive knowledge of the innermost workings of the human heart, that as there is

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nothing surpassing this scene in Shakspeare himself, so there is nothing that can be compared to it in any other writer.

CORDELIA.

How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

LEAR.

You do me wrong to take me out of the grave.
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

CORDELIA.

Sir, do you know me?

LEAR.

You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?

CORDELIA.

Still, still far wide!

PHYSICIAN.

He's scarce awake: let him alone awhile.

LEAR.

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight!
I am mightily abused. I should even die with pity
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands: Let's see;
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured
Of my condition.

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CORDELIA.

O look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me :—
No, sir, you must not kneel.

LEAR.

Pray, do not mock me :
I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upwards ; and to deal plainly with you,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man,
Yet I am doubtful : for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is ; and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments ; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me ;
For as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA.

And so I am, I am.

LEAR.

Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray you weep not.
If you have poison for me I will drink it.
I know you do not love me ; for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong :
You have some cause, they have not.

CORDELIA.

No cause, no cause !

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As we do not estimate Cordelia's affection for her father by the coldness of her language so neither should we measure her indignation against her sisters by the mildness in her expressions. What, in fact, can be more eloquently significant, and at the same time more characteristic of Cordelia, than the single line when she and her father are conveyed to their prison:

Shall we not see these *daughters* and these *sisters?*

The irony here is so bitter and intense, and at the same time so quiet, so feminine, so dignified in the expression, that who but Cordelia would have uttered it in the same manner, or would have condensed such ample meaning into so few and simple words?

We lose sight of Cordelia during the whole of the second and third, and a great part of the fourth act; but towards the conclusion she reappears. Just as our sense of human misery and wickedness, being carried to its extreme height, becomes nearly intolerable, "like an engine wrenching our frame of nature from its fixed place,"

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then, like a redeeming angel, she descends to mingle in the scene, "loosening the springs of pity in our eyes," and relieving the impressions of pain and terror by those of admiration and a tender pleasure. For the catastrophe, it is indeed terrible! wondrous terrible! When Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms, compassion and awe so seize on all our faculties, that we are left only to silence and to tears. But if I might judge from my own sensations, the catastrophe of Lear is not so overwhelming as the catastrophe of Othello. We do not turn away with the same feeling of absolute unmitigated despair. Cordelia is a saint ready prepared for heaven—our earth is not good enough for her: and Lear! O who, after sufferings and tortures such as his, would wish to see his life prolonged? What! replace a sceptre in that shaking hand?—a crown upon that old grey head, on which the tempest had poured in its wrath?—on which the deep dread-bolted thunders and the winged lightnings had spent their fury? O never, never!

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> Let him pass! he hates him
> That would upon the rack of this rough world
> Stretch him out longer.

In the story of King Lear and his three daughters, as it is related in the "delectable and mellifluous" romance of Perceforest, and in the Chronicle of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the conclusion is fortunate. Cordelia defeats her sisters, and replaces her father on his throne. Spenser, in his version of the story, has followed these authorities. Shakspeare has preferred the catastrophe of the old ballad, founded apparently on some lost tradition. I suppose it is by way of amending his errors, and bringing back this daring innovator to sober history, that it has been thought fit to alter the play of Lear for the stage, as they have altered Romeo and Juliet; they have converted the seraph-like Cordelia into a puling love heroine, and sent her off victorious at the end of the play—exit with drums and colours flying—to be married to Edgar. Now anything more absurd, more discordant with all our previous impressions, and with the charac-

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ters as unfolded to us, can hardly be imagined. "I cannot conceive," says Schlegel, "what ideas of art and dramatic connexion those persons have, who suppose we can at pleasure tack a double conclusion to a tragedy—a melancholy one for hard-hearted spectators, and a merry one for those of softer mould." The fierce manners depicted in this play, the extremes of virtue and vice in the persons, belong to the remote period of the story.[1] There is no attempt at character in the old narratives; Regan and Goneril are monsters of ingratitude, and Cordelia merely distinguished by her filial piety; whereas, in Shakspeare, this filial piety is an affection quite distinct from the qualities which serve to individualise the human being; we have a perception of innate character apart from all accidental circumstance: we see that if Cordelia had never known her father, had never been

[1] King Lear may be supposed to have lived about one thousand years before the Christian era, being the fourth or fifth in descent from King Brut, the great grandson of Æneas, and the fabulous founder of the kingdom of Britain.

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rejected from his love, had never been a born princess or a crowned queen, she would not have been less Cordelia; less distinctly *herself;* that is, a woman of a steady mind, of calm but deep affections, of inflexible truth, of few words, and of reserved deportment.

As to Regan and Goneril—"tigers, not daughters,"—we might wish to regard them as mere hateful chimeras, impossible as they are detestable; but unfortunately there was once a Tullia. I know not where to look for the prototype of Cordelia: there was a Julia Alpinula, the young priestess of Aventicum,[1] who, unable to save her father's life by the sacrifice of her own, died with him—"*infelix patris, infelix proles*,"—but this is all we know of her. There was the Roman daughter, too. I remember seeing at Genoa, Guido's "Pieta Romana," in which the expression of the female bending over the aged parent, who feeds from her bosom, is perfect,—but it is not a Cordelia: only Raffaelle could have painted Cordelia.

[1] She is commemorated by Lord Byron. Vide Childe Harold, Canto iii.

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But the character which at once suggests itself in comparison with Cordelia, as the heroine of filial tenderness and piety, is certainly the Antigone of Sophocles. As poetical conceptions, they rest on the same basis: they are both pure abstractions of truth, piety, and natural affection; and in both, love, as a passion, is kept entirely out of sight: for though the womanly character is sustained by making them the objects of devoted attachment, yet to have portrayed them as influenced by passion, would have destroyed that unity of purpose and feeling which is one source of power ; and, besides, have disturbed that serene purity and grandeur of soul, which equally distinguishes both heroines. The spirit, however, in which the two characters are conceived, is as different as possible; and we must not fail to remark, that Antigone, who plays a principal part in two fine tragedies, and is distinctly and completely made out, is considered as a masterpiece, the very triumph of the ancient classical drama; whereas, there are many among Shakspeare's characters

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which are equal to Cordelia as dramatic conceptions, and superior to her in finishing of outline, as well as in the richness of the poetical colouring.

When Œdipus, pursued by the vengeance of the gods, deprived of sight by his own mad act, and driven from Thebes by his subjects and his sons, wanders forth, abject and forlorn, he is supported by his daughter Antigone; who leads him from city to city, begs for him, and pleads for him against the harsh, rude men, who, struck more by his guilt than his misery, would drive him from his last asylum. In the opening of the "Œdipus Coloneus," where the wretched old man appears leaning on his child, and seats himself in the consecrated Grove of the Furies, the picture presented to us is wonderfully solemn and beautiful. The patient, duteous tenderness of Antigone; the scene in which she pleads for her brother Polynices, and supplicates her father to receive his offending son; her remonstrance to Polynices, when she entreats him not to carry the threatened war into his native

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country, are finely and powerfully delineated; and in her lamentation over Œdipus, when he perishes in the mysterious grove, there is a pathetic beauty, apparent even through the stiffness of the translation.

> Alas! I only wished I might have died
> With my poor father; wherefore should I ask
> For longer life?
> O I was fond of misery with him;
> E'en what was most unlovely grew beloved
> When he was with me. O my dearest father,
> Beneath the earth now in deep darkness hid,
> Worn as thou wert with age, to me thou still
> Wert dear, and shall be ever.
> —Even as he wished he died,
> In a strange land—for such was his desire—
> A shady turf covered his lifeless limbs,
> Nor unlamented fell! for O these eyes,
> My father, still shall weep for thee, nor time
> E'er blot thee from my memory.

The filial piety of Antigone is the most affecting part of the tragedy of "Œdipus Coloneus:" her sisterly affection, and her heroic self-devotion to a religious duty, form the plot of the tragedy called by her name. When her two brothers, Eteocles and Poly-

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nices, had slain each other before the walls of Thebes, Creon issued an edict forbidding the rights of sepulture to Polynices (as the invader of his country), and awarding instant death to those who should dare to bury him. We know the importance which the ancients attached to the funeral obsequies, as alone securing their admission into the Elysian fields. Antigone, upon hearing the law of Creon, which thus carried vengeance beyond the grave, enters in the first scene, announcing her fixed resolution to brave the threatened punishment: he sister Ismene shrinks from sharing the peril of such an undertaking, and endeavours to dissuade her from it, on which Antigone replies—

> Wert thou to proffer what I do not ask—
> Thy poor assistance—I would scorn it now;
> Act as thou wilt, I'll bury him myself:
> Let me perform but that, and death is welcome.
> I'll do the pious deed, and lay me down
> By my dear brother; loving and beloved,
> We'll rest together.

She proceeds to execute her generous purpose; she covers with earth the mangled

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corse of Polynices, pours over it the accustomed libations, is detected in her pious office, and after nobly defending her conduct, is led to death by command of the tyrant: her sister Ismene, struck with shame and remorse, now comes forward to accuse herself as a partaker in the offence, and share her sister's punishment; but Antigone sternly and scornfully rejects her; and after pouring forth a beautiful lamentation on the misery of perishing "without the nuptial song—a virgin and a slave," she dies *à l'antique*—she strangles herself to avoid a lingering death.

Hemon, the son of Creon, unable to save her life, kills himself upon her grave: but throughout the whole tragedy we are left in doubt whether Antigone does or does not return the affection of this devoted lover.

Thus it will be seen that in the Antigone there is a great deal of what may be called the effect of situation, as well as a great deal of poetry and character: she says the most beautiful things in the world, per-

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forms the most heroic actions, and all her words and actions are so placed before us as to *command* our admiration. According to the classical ideas of virtue and heroism, the character is sublime, and in the delineation there is a severe simplicity mingled with its Grecian grace, a unity, a grandeur, an elegance, which appeal to our taste and our understanding, while they fill and exalt the imagination; but in Cordelia it is not the external colouring or form, it is not what she says or does, but what she is in herself, what she feels, thinks, and suffers, which continually awaken our sympathy and interest. The heroism of Cordelia is more passive and tender—it melts into our heart; and in the veiled loveliness and unostentatious delicacy of her character, there is an effect more profound and artless, if it be less striking and less elaborate than in the Grecian heroine. To Antigone we give our admiration, to Cordelia our tears. Antigone stands before us in her austere and statue-like beauty, like one of the marbles of the Parthenon. If

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Cordelia reminded us of anything on earth, it is of one of the Madonnas in the old Italian pictures, "with downcast eyes beneath th' almighty dove:" and as that heavenly form is connected with our human sympathies only by the expression of maternal tenderness or maternal sorrow, even so Cordelia would be almost too angelic, were she not linked to our earthly feelings, bound to our very hearts, by her filial love, her wrongs, her sufferings, and her tears.

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I CANNOT agree with one of the most philosophical of Shakspeare's critics, who has asserted "that the actual truth of particular events, in proportion as we are conscious of it, is a drawback on the pleasure as well as the dignity of tragedy." If this

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observation applies at all, it is equally just with regard to characters: and in either case can we admit it? The reverence and the simpleness of heart with which Shakspeare has treated the received and admitted truths of history—I mean according to the imperfect knowledge of his time—is admirable; his inaccuracies are few: his general accuracy, allowing for the distinction between the narrative and the dramatic form, is acknowledged to be wonderful. He did not steal the precious material from the treasury of history, to debase its purity,—new-stamp it arbitrarily with effigies and legends of his own devising, and then attempt to pass it current, like Dryden, Racine, and the rest of those poetical coiners: he only rubbed off the rust, purified and brightened it, so that history herself has been known to receive it back as sterling.

Truth, wherever manifested, should be sacred: so Shakspeare deemed, and laid no profane hand upon her altars. But tragedy—majestic tragedy, is worthy to stand

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before the sanctuary of Truth, and to be the priestess of her oracles. "Whatever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable or grave, whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of that which is called fortune from without, or the wily subtleties and refluxes of man's thought from within:"[1]—whatever is pitiful in the weakness, sublime in the strength, or terrible in the perversion of human intellect, these are the domain of Tragedy. Sybil and Muse at once, she holds aloft the book of human fate, and is the interpreter of its mysteries. It is not, then, making a mock of the serious sorrows of real life, nor of those human beings who lived, suffered, and acted upon this earth, to array them in her rich and stately robes, and present them before us as powers evoked from dust and darkness, to awaken the generous sympathies, the terror or the pity of mankind. It does not add to the pain, as far as tragedy is a source of emotion, that the wrongs and sufferings repre-

[1] Milton.

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sented, the guilt of Lady Macbeth, the despair of Constance, the arts of Cleopatra, and the distresses of Katherine, had a real existence; but it adds infinitely to the moral effect, as a subject of contemplation and a lesson of conduct.[1]

I shall be able to illustrate these observations more fully in the course of this section, in which we will consider those characters which are drawn from history; and first, Cleopatra.

Of all Shakspeare's female characters, Miranda and Cleopatra appear to me the most wonderful. The first, unequalled as a poetic conception: the latter miraculous as a work of art. If we could make a regular classification of his characters, these would form the two extremes of simplicity

[1] "That the treachery of King John, the death of Arthur, and the grief of Constance, had a real truth in history, sharpens the sense of pain, while it hangs a leaden weight on the heart and the imagination. Something whispers us that we have no right to make a mock of calamities like these, or turn the truth of things into the puppet and plaything of our fancies."—See Characters of Shakspeare's Plays.—To consider *thus* is not to consider *too* deeply, but not deeply *enough*.

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and complexity; and all his other characters would be found to fill up some shade or gradation between these two.

Great crimes, springing from high passions, grafted on high qualities, are the legitimate source of tragic poetry. But to make the extreme of littleness produce an effect like grandeur—to make the excess of frailty produce an effect like power —to heap up together all that is most unsubstantial, frivolous, vain, contemptible, and variable, till the worthlessness be lost in the magnitude, and a sense of the sublime spring from the very elements of littleness,—to do this, belonged only to Shakspeare, that worker of miracles. Cleopatra is a brilliant antithesis, a compound of contradictions, of all that we most hate, with what we most admire. The whole character is the triumph of the external over the innate; and yet like one of her country's hieroglyphics, though she present at first view a splendid and perplexing anomaly, there is deep meaning and wondrous skill in the apparent enigma, when

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we come to analyze and decipher it. But how are we to arrive at the solution of this glorious riddle, whose dazzling complexity continually mocks and eludes us? What is most astonishing in the character of Cleopatra is its antithetical construction —its *consistent inconsistency*, if I may use such an expression—which renders it quite impossible to reduce it to any elementary principles. It will, perhaps, be found on the whole, that vanity and the love of power predominate; but I dare not say it *is* so, for these qualities and a hundred others mingle into each other, and shift, and change, and glance away, like the colours in a peacock's train.

In some others of Shakspeare's female characters, also remarkable for their complexity (Portia and Juliet, for instance), we are struck with the delightful sense of harmony in the midst of contrast, so that the idea of unity and simplicity of effect is produced in the midst of variety; but in Cleopatra it is the absence of unity and simplicity which strikes us; the impression is that of

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perpetual and irreconcileable contrast. The continual approximation of whatever is most opposite in character, in situation, in sentiment, would be fatiguing, were it not so perfectly natural: the woman herself would be distracting, if she were not so enchanting.

I have not the slightest doubt that Shakspeare's Cleopatra is the real historical Cleopatra—the "Rare Egyptian"—individualised and placed before us. Her mental accomplishments, her unequalled grace, her woman's wit and woman's wiles, her irresistible allurements, her starts of irregular grandeur, her bursts of ungovernable temper, her vivacity of imagination, her petulant caprice, her fickleness and her falsehood, her tenderness and her truth, her childish susceptibility to flattery, her magnificent spirit, her royal pride, the gorgeous eastern colouring of the character; all these contradictory elements has Shakspeare seized, mingled them in their extremes, and fused them into one brilliant impersonation of classical elegance, Oriental voluptuousness, and gipsy sorcery.

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What better proof can we have of the individual truth of the character than the admission that Shakspeare's Cleopatra produces exactly the same effect on us that is recorded of the real Cleopatra? She dazzles our faculties, perplexes our judgment, bewilders and bewitches our fancy;

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from the beginning to the end of the drama, we are conscious of a kind of fascination against which our moral sense rebels, but from which there is no escape. The epithets applied to her perpetually by Antony and others confirm this impression: "enchanting queen!"—"witch"—"spell"—"great fairy"—"cockatrice"—"serpent of old Nile"—"thou grave charm!"[1]—are only a few of them; and who does not know by heart the famous quotations in which this Egyptian Circe is described with all her infinite seductions?

> Fie! wrangling queen!
> Whom every thing becomes—to chide, to laugh,
> To weep; whose every passion fully strives
> To make itself, in thee, fair and admired.
>
> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety:—
> For vilest things
> Become themselves in her.

And the pungent irony of Enobarbus has well exposed her feminine arts, when

[1] *Grave*, in the sense of mighty or potent.

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he says, on the occasion of Antony's intended departure,

Cleopatra, catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly: I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment.

ANTONY.

She is cunning past man's thought.

ENOBARBUS.

Alack, sir, no! her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love. We cannot call her winds and waters, sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacks can report: this cannot be cunning in her; if it be, she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove.

The whole secret of her absolute dominion over the facile Antony may be found in one little speech:

See where he is—who's with him—what he does—
(I did not send you.) If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick! Quick! and return.

CHARMIAN.

Madam, methinks if you did love him dearly,
You do not hold the method to enforce
The like from him.

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CLEOPATRA.

What should I do, I do not?

CHARMIAN.

In each thing give him way; cross him in nothing.

CLEOPATRA.

Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him.

CHARMIAN.

Tempt him not too far.

But Cleopatra is a mistress of her art, and knows better: and what a picture of her triumphant petulance, her imperious and imperial coquetry, is given in her own words!

That time—O times!
I laugh'd him out of patience; and that night
I laugh'd him into patience: and next morn,
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
I wore his sword, Philippan.

When Antony enters full of some serious purpose which he is about to impart, the woman's perverseness, and the tyrannical

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waywardness with which she taunts him and plays upon his temper, are admirably depicted.

I know, by that same eye, there's some good news.
What says the married woman?[1] You may go;
Would she had never given you leave to come!
Let her not say, 'tis I that keep you here;
I have no power upon you; hers you are.

ANTONY.

The gods best know——

CLEOPATRA.

O, never was there queen
So mightily betray'd! Yet at the first,
I saw the treasons planted.

ANTONY.

Cleopatra!

CLEOPATRA.

Why should I think you can be mine, and true,
Though you in swearing shake the throned gods,
Who have been false to Fulvia? Riotous madness,
To be entangled with those mouth-made vows,
Which break themselves in swearing!

ANTONY.

Most sweet queen!

[1] Fulvia, the first wife of Antony.

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CLEOPATRA.

Nay, pray you, seek no colour for your going,
But bid farewell, and go.

She recovers her dignity for a moment at the news of Fulvia's death, as if roused by a blow:

Though age from folly could not give me freedom,
It does from childishness. Can Fulvia die?

And then follows the artful mockery with which she tempts and provokes him, in order to discover whether he regrets his wife.

O most false love!
Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill
With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see
In Fulvia's death, how mine receiv'd shall be.

ANTONY.

Quarrel no more; but be prepared to know
The purposes I bear: which are, or cease,
As you shall give th' advice. Now, by the fire
That quickens Nilus' shrine, I go from hence
Thy soldier, servant, making peace or war,
As thou affectest.

CLEOPATRA.

Cut my lace, Charmian, come—

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But let it be. I am quickly ill, and well,
So Antony loves.

ANTONY.

My precious queen, forbear:
And give true evidence to his love which stands
An honourable trial.

CLEOPATRA.

So Fulvia told me.
I pr'ythee turn aside, and weep for her;
Then bid adieu to me, and say, the tears
Belong to Egypt. Good now, play one scene
Of excellent dissembling; and let it look
Like perfect honour.

ANTONY.

You 'll heat my blood—no more!

CLEOPATRA.

You can do better yet; but this is meetly.

ANTONY.

Now, by my sword—

CLEOPATRA.

And target—still he mends:
But this is not the best. Look, pr'ythee, Charmian,
How this Herculean Roman does become
The carriage of his chafe!

This is, indeed, most "excellent dissembling;" but when she has fooled and chafed

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the Herculean Roman to the verge of danger, then comes that return of tenderness which secures the power she has tried to the utmost, and we have all the elegant, the poetical Cleopatra in her beautiful farewell.

> Forgive me!
> Since my becomings kill me when they do not
> Eye well to you. Your honour calls you hence,
> Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
> And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
> Sit laurell'd victory; and smooth success
> Be strew'd before your feet!

Finer still are the workings of her variable mind and lively imagination, after Antony's departure; her fond repining at his absence, her violent spirit, her right royal wilfulness and impatience, as if it were a wrong to her majesty, an insult to her sceptre, that there should exist in her despite such things as space and time; and high treason to her sovereign power, to dare to remember what she chooses to forget.

> Give me to drink mandragora,
> That I might sleep out this great gap of time

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My Antony is away.

O Charmian!

Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he,
Or does he walk? or is he on his horse?
O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony!
Do bravely, horse! for wot'st thou whom thou mov'st?
The demi-Atlas of this earth—the arm
And burgonet of men. He's speaking now,
Or murmuring, Where's my serpent of old Nile?
For so he calls me.

Met'st thou my posts?

ALEXAS.

Ay, madam, twenty several messengers:
Why do you send so thick?

CLEOPATRA.

Who's born that day
When I forget to send to Antony,
Shall die a beggar. Ink and paper, Charmian.
Welcome, my good Alexas. Did I, Charmian,
Ever love Cæsar so?

CHARMIAN.

O that brave Cæsar!

CLEOPATRA.

Be chok'd with such another emphasis!
Say, the brave Antony.

CHARMIAN.

The valiant Cæsar!

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CLEOPATRA.

By Isis, I will give thee bloody teeth,
If thou with Cæsar paragon again
My man of men!

CHARMIAN.

By your most gracious pardon,
I sing but after you.

CLEOPATRA.

My salad days,
When I was green in judgment, cold in blood,
To say as I said then. But, come away—
Get me some ink and paper: he shall have every day
A several greeting, or I'll unpeople Egypt.

We learn from Plutarch, that it was a favourite amusement with Antony and Cleopatra to ramble through the streets at night, and bandy ribald jests with the populace of Alexandria. From the same authority, we know that they were accustomed to live on the most familiar terms with their attendants and the companions of their revels. To these traits we must add, that with all her violence, perverseness, egotism, and caprice, Cleopatra mingled a capability for warm affections and kindly feeling, or rather what

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we should call in these days, a constitutional *good-nature*; and was lavishly generous to her favourites and dependants. These characteristics we find scattered through the play; they are not only faithfully rendered by Shakspeare, but he has made the finest use of them in his delineation of manners. Hence the occasional freedom of her women and her attendants, in the midst of their fears and flatteries, becomes most natural and consistent: hence, too, their devoted attachment and fidelity, proved even in death. But as illustrative of Cleopatra's disposition, perhaps the finest and most characteristic scene in the whole play, is that in which the messenger arrives from Rome with the tidings of Antony's marriage with Octavia. She perceives at once with quickness that all is not well, and she hastens to anticipate the worst, that she may have the pleasure of being disappointed. Her impatience to know what she fears to learn, the vivacity with which she gradually works herself up into a state of excitement, and at length into fury, is wrought out with a force of truth which makes us recoil.

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CLEOPATRA.

Antony's dead;
If thou say so, villain, thou kill'st thy mistress.
But well and free,
If thou so yield him, there is gold, and here
My bluest veins to kiss: a hand that kings
Have lipp'd, and trembled kissing.

MESSENGER.

First, madam, he is well.

CLEOPATRA.

Why, there's more gold. But, sirrah, mark! we use
To say, the dead are well: bring it to that,
The gold I give thee will I melt, and pour
Down thy ill-uttering throat.

MESSENGER.

Good madam, hear me.

CLEOPATRA.

Well, go to, I will.
But there's no goodness in thy face. If Antony
Be free and healthful, why so tart a favour
To trumpet such good tidings? If not well,
Thou should'st come like a fury crown'd with snakes.

MESSENGER.

Will 't please you hear me?

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CLEOPATRA.

I have a mind to strike thee ere thou speak'st,
Yet if thou say Antony lives, is well,
Or friends with Cæsar, or not captive to him,
I'll set thee in a shower of gold, and hail
Rich pearls upon thee.

MESSENGER.

Madam, he's well.

CLEOPATRA.

Well said.

MESSENGER.

And friends with Cæsar.

CLEOPATRA.

Thou art an honest man.

MESSENGER.

Cæsar and he are greater friends than ever.

CLEOPATRA.

Make thee a fortune from me.

MESSENGER.

But yet, madam—

CLEOPATRA.

I do not like *but yet*—it does allay
The good precedence. Fie upon *but yet*:
But yet is as a gaoler to bring forth

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Some monstrous malefactor. Pr'ythee, friend,
Pour out thy pack of matter to mine ear,
The good and bad together. He's friends with Cæsar;
In state of health, thou say'st; and thou say'st free.

MESSENGER.

Free, madam! No: I made no such report;
He's bound unto Octavia.

CLEOPATRA.

For what good turn?

MESSENGER.

Madam, he's married to Octavia.

CLEOPATRA.

The most infectious pestilence upon thee!
[*Strikes him down.*

MESSENGER.

Good madam, patience.

CLEOPATRA.

What say you? [*Strikes him again.*
Hence, horrible villain! or I'll spurn thine eyes
Like balls before me—I'll unhair thine head—
Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stewed in brine,
Smarting in ling'ring pickle.

MESSENGER.

Gracious madam!
I, that do bring the news, made not the match.

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CLEOPATRA.

Say 't is not so, a province I will give thee,
And make thy fortunes proud: the blow thou hadst
Shall make thy peace for moving me to rage;
And I will boot thee with what gift beside
Thy modesty can beg.

MESSENGER.

He's married, madam.

CLEOPATRA.

Rogue, thou hast lived too long. [*Draws a dagger.*

MESSENGER.

Nay then I'll run.
What mean you, madam? I have made no fault.
[*Exit.*

CHARMIAN.

Good madam, keep yourself within yourself;
The man is innocent.

CLEOPATRA.

Some innocents 'scape not the thunderbolt.
Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures
Turn all to serpents! Call the slave again;
Though I am mad, I will not bite him—Call!

CHARMIAN.

He is afraid to come.

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CLEOPATRA.

I will not hurt him.
These hands do lack nobility, that they strike
A meaner than myself.

* * * *

CLEOPATRA.

In praising Antony I have dispraised Cæsar.

CHARMIAN.

Many times, madam.

CLEOPATRA.

I am paid for 't now—
Lead me from hence.
I faint. O Iras, Charmian—'tis no matter:
Go to the fellow, good Alexas; bid him
Report the features of Octavia, her years,
Her inclination—let him not leave out
The colour of her hair. Bring me word quickly.
[*Exit Alexas.*
Let him for ever go—let him not—Charmian,
Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon,
T' other way he's a Mars. Bid you Alexas
[*To Mardian.*
Bring me word how tall she is. Pity me, Charmian.
But do not speak to me. Lead me to my chamber.

I have given this scene entire because I know nothing comparable to it. The pride

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and arrogance of the Egyptian queen, the blandishment of the woman, the unexpected but natural transitions of temper and feeling, the contest of various passions, and at length—when the wild hurricane has spent its fury—the melting into tears, faintness, and languishment, are portrayed with the most astonishing power, and truth, and skill in feminine nature. More wonderful still is the splendour and force of colouring which is spread over this extraordinary scene. The mere idea of an angry woman beating her menial, presents something ridiculous or disgusting to the mind; in a queen or a tragedy heroine it is still more indecorous;[1] yet this scene is as far as possible from the vulgar or the comic. Cleopatra seems privileged to "touch the brink of all we hate" with impunity. This imperial termagant, this "wrangling queen, whom every thing becomes," becomes even her fury. We

[1] The well-known violence and coarseness of Queen Elizabeth's manners, in which she was imitated by the women about her, may in Shakspeare's time have rendered the image of a royal virago less offensive and less extraordinary.

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know not by what strange power it is, that in the midst of all these unruly passions and childish caprices, the poetry of the character, and the fanciful and sparkling grace of the delineation are sustained and still rule in the imagination; but we feel that it is so.

I need hardly observe, that we have historical authority for the excessive violence of Cleopatra's temper. Witness the story of her boxing the ears of her treasurer, in presence of Octavius, as related by Plutarch. Shakspeare has made a fine use of this anecdote also towards the conclusion of the drama, but it is not equal in power to this scene with the messenger.

The man is afterwards brought back, almost by force, to satisfy Cleopatra's jealous anxiety, by a description of Octavia:—but this time, made wise by experience, he takes care to adapt his information to the humours of his imperious mistress, and gives her a satirical picture of her rival. The scene which follows, in which Cleopatra—artful, acute, and penetrating as she is—becomes the dupe of her feminine spite and

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jealousy, nay, assists in duping herself; and after having cuffed the messenger for telling her truths which are offensive, rewards him for the falsehood which flatters her weakness—is not only an admirable exhibition of character, but a fine moral lesson.

She concludes, after dismissing the messenger with gold and thanks,

> I repent me much
> That I so harry'd him. Why, methinks by him
> This creature's no such thing?
>
> CHARMIAN.
>
> O nothing, madam.
>
> CLEOPATRA.
>
> The man hath seen some majesty, and should know!

Do we not fancy Cleopatra drawing herself up with all the vain consciousness of rank and beauty, as she pronounces this last line? and is not this the very woman who celebrated her own apotheosis,—who arrayed herself in the robe and diadem of the goddess Isis, and could find no titles magnificent enough for her children but those of *the Sun* and *the Moon?*

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The despotism and insolence of her temper are touched in some other places most admirably. Thus, when she is told that the Romans libel and abuse her, she exclaims,

> Sink Rome, and their tongues rot
> That speak against us!

And when one of her attendants observes, that "Herod of Jewry dared not look upon her but when she were well pleased," she immediately replies, "That Herod's head I'll have." [1]

When Proculeius surprises her in her monument, and snatches her poniard from her, terror and fury, pride, passion, and disdain, swell in her haughty soul, and seem to shake her very being.

> CLEOPATRA.
>
> Where art thou, death?
> Come hither, come! come, come and take a queen
> Worth many babes and beggars!
>
> PROCULEIUS.
>
> O temperance, lady?

[1] She was as good as her word. See the Life of Antony in Plutarch.

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CLEOPATRA.

Sir, I will eat no meat; I'll not drink, sir:
If idle talk will once be necessary,
I 'll not sleep neither; this mortal house I 'll ruin,
Do Cæsar what he can! Know, sir, that I
Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court,
Nor once be chastis'd with the sober eye
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up,
And show me to the shouting varletry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave to me! Rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark naked, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring! Rather make
My country's high pyramids my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains!

In the same spirit of royal bravado, but finer still, and worked up with a truly Oriental exuberance of fancy and imagery, is her famous description of Antony, addressed to Dolabella:

Most noble empress, you have heard of me?

CLEOPATRA.

I cannot tell.

DOLABELLA.

Assuredly, you know me.

CLEOPATRA.

No matter, sir, what I have heard or known.

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You laugh when boys, or women, tell their dreams;
Is 't not your trick?

DOLABELLA.

I understand not, madam.

CLEOPATRA.

I dream'd there was emperor Antony;
O such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man!

DOLABELLA.

If it might please you ——

CLEOPATRA.

His face was as the heavens; and therein stuck
A sun and moon; which kept their course, and lighted
The little O, the earth.

DOLABELLA.

Most sovereign creature ——

CLEOPATRA.

His legs bestrid the ocean: his reared arm
Crested the world; his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail or shake the orb
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in 't; an autumn 't was,
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphin like; they show'd his back above

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The element they liv'd in. In his livery [1]
Walk'd crowns and coronets: realms and islands were
As plates [2] dropp'd from his pocket.

DOLABELLA.

Cleopatra!

CLEOPATRA.

Think you there was, or might be, such a man
As this I dream'd of?

DOLABELLA.

Gentle madam, no.

CLEOPATRA.

You lie,—up to the hearing of the gods!

There was no room left in this amazing picture for the display of that passionate maternal tenderness, which was a strong and redeeming feature in Cleopatra's historical character; but it is not left untouched; for when she is imprecating mischiefs on herself, she wishes, as the last and worst of possible evils, that "thunder may smite Cæsarion!"

In representing the mutual passion of Antony and Cleopatra as real and fervent,

[1] *i. e.*, retinue.

[2] *i. e.*, silver coins, from the Spanish *plata*.

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Shakspeare has adhered to the truth of history as well as to general nature. On Antony's side it is a species of infatuation, a single and engrossing feeling: it is, in short, the love of a man declined in years for a woman very much younger than himself, and who has subjected him to every species of female enchantment. In Cleopatra the passion is of a mixt nature, made up of real attachment, combined with the love of pleasure, the love of power, and the love of self. Not only is the character most complicated, but no one sentiment could have existed pure and unvarying in such a mind as hers; her passion in itself is true, fixed to one centre; but like the pennon streaming from the mast, it flutters and veers with every breath of her variable temper: yet in the midst of all her caprices, follies, and even vices, womanly feeling is still predominant in Cleopatra: and the change which takes place in her deportment towards Antony, when their evil fortune darkens round them, is as beautiful and interesting in itself as it is striking and natural. In-

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stead of the airy caprice and provoking petulance she displays in the first scenes, we have a mixture of tenderness, and artifice, and fear, and submissive blandishment. Her behaviour, for instance, after the battle of Actium, when she quails before the noble and tender rebuke of her lover, is partly female subtlety and partly natural feeling.

CLEOPATRA.

O my lord, my lord,
Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought
You would have follow'd.

ANTONY.

Egypt, thou know'st too well
My heart was to the rudder tied by the strings,
And thou should'st tow me after. O'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou know'st; and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.

CLEOPATRA.

O, my pardon?

ANTONY.

Now I must
To the young man send humble treaties, dodge
And palter in the shifts of lowness; who

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With half the bulk o' the world play'd as I pleased,
Making and marring fortunes. You did know
How much you were my conqueror; and that
My sword, made weak by my affection, would
Obey it on all cause.

CLEOPATRA.

O pardon, pardon!

ANTONY.

Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates
All that is won or lost. Give me a kiss;
Even this repays me.

It is perfectly in keeping with the individual character, that Cleopatra, alike destitute of moral strength and physical courage, should cower, terrified and subdued, before the masculine spirit of her lover, when once she has fairly roused it. Thus Tasso's Armida, half syren, half sorceress, in the moment of strong feeling, forgets her incantations, and has recourse to persuasion, to prayers, and to tears.

Lascia gl' incanti, e vuol provar se vaga
E supplice beltà sia miglior maga.

Though the poet afterwards gives us to

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understand that even in this relinquishment of art there was a more refined artifice.

Nella doglia amara
Già tutte non oblia l' arti e le frodi.

And something like this inspires the conduct of Cleopatra towards Antony in his fallen fortunes. The reader should refer to that fine scene where Antony surprises Thyreus kissing her hand, "that kingly seal and plighter of high hearts," and rages like a thousand hurricanes.

The character of Mark Antony, as delineated by Shakspeare, reminds me of the Farnese Hercules. There is an ostentatious display of power, an exaggerated grandeur, a colossal effect in the whole conception, sustained throughout in the pomp of the language, which seems, as it flows along, to resound with the clang of arms and the music of the revel. The coarseness and violence of the historic portrait are a little kept down; but every word which Antony utters is characteristic of the arrogant but magnanimous Roman, who, "with half the

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bulk o' the world played as he pleased," and was himself the sport of a host of mad (and bad) passions, and the slave of a woman.

History is followed closely in all the details of the catastrophe, and there is something wonderfully grand in the hurried march of events towards the conclusion. As disasters hem her round, Cleopatra gathers up her faculties to meet them, not with the calm fortitude of a great soul, but the haughty tameless spirit of a wilful woman, unused to reverse or contradiction.

Her speech, after Antony has expired in her arms, I have always regarded as one of the most wonderful in Shakspeare. Cleopatra is not a woman to grieve silently. The contrast between the violence of her passions and the weakness of her sex, between her regal grandeur and her excess of misery; her impetuous, unavailing struggles with the fearful destiny which has compassed her, and the mixture of wild impatience and pathos in her agony, are really magnificent. She faints on the body of Antony, and is recalled to life by the cries of her women—

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IRAS.

Royal Egypt—empress!

CLEOPATRA.

No more, but e'en a woman![1] and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks,
And does the meanest chares.—It were for me
To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods;
To tell them that our world did equal theirs
Till they had stolen our jewel. All's but nought;
Patience is sottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad. Then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death
Ere death dare come to us? How do you, women?
What, what? good cheer! why how now, Charmian?
My noble girls!—ah, women, women! look
Our lamp is spent, is out.
We 'll bury him, and then what's brave, what's noble,
Let 's do it after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us.

But although Cleopatra talks of dying "after the high Roman fashion," she fears what she most desires, and cannot perform with simplicity what costs her such an effort. That extreme physical cowardice, which was so strong a trait in her historical

[1] Cleopatra replies to the first word she hears on recovering her senses, "No more *an empress*, but a mere woman!"

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character, which led to the defeat of Actium, which made her delay the execution of a fatal resolve, till she had "tried conclusions infinite of *easy* ways to die," Shakspeare has rendered with the finest possible effect, and in a manner which heightens instead of diminishing our respect and interest. Timid by nature, she is courageous by the mere force of will, and she lashes herself up with high-sounding words into a kind of false daring. Her lively imagination suggests every incentive which can spur her on to the deed she has resolved, yet trembles to contemplate. She pictures to herself all the degradations which must attend her captivity: and let it be observed, that those which she anticipates are precisely such as a vain, luxurious, and haughty woman would especially dread, and which only true virtue and magnanimity could despise. Cleopatra could have endured the loss of freedom; but to be led in triumph through the streets of Rome is insufferable. She could stoop to Cæsar with dissembling courtesy, and meet duplicity with superior

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art; but "to be chastised" by the scornful or upbraiding glance of the injured Octavia —"rather a ditch in Egypt!"

If knife, drugs, serpents, have
Edge, sting, or operation, I am safe.
Your wife, Octavia, with her modest eyes,
And still conclusion,[1] shall acquire no honour
Demuring upon me.
Now Iras, what think'st thou?
Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shalt be shown
In Rome as well as I. Mechanic slaves,
With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers, shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forc'd to drink their vapour.

IRAS.

The gods forbid!

CLEOPATRA.

Nay, 't is most certain, Iras. Saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets; and scald rhymers
Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels. Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth; and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness.

She then calls for her diadem, her robes

[1] *i. e.*, sedate determination.—JOHNSON.

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of state, and attires herself as if "again for Cydnus, to meet Mark Antony." Coquette to the last, she must make Death proud to take her, and die, "phœnix like," as she had lived, with all the pomp of preparation —luxurious in her despair.

The death of Lucretia, of Portia, of Arria, and others who died "after the high Roman fashion," is sublime according to the Pagan ideas of virtue, and yet none of them so powerfully affect the imagination as the catastrophe of Cleopatra. The idea of this frail, timid, wayward woman dying with heroism from the mere force of passion and will, takes us by surprise. The Attic elegance of her mind, her poetical imagination, the pride of beauty and royalty predominating to the last, and the sumptuous and picturesque accompaniments with which she surrounds herself in death, carry to its extreme height that effect of contrast which prevails through her life and character. No arts, no invention could add to the real circumstances of Cleopatra's closing scene. Shakspeare has shown profound

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judgment and feeling in adhering closely to the classical authorities; and to say that the language and sentiments worthily fill up the outline, is the most magnificent praise that can be given. The magical play of fancy and the overpowering fascination of the character are kept up to the last: and when Cleopatra, on applying the asp, silences the lamentations of her women—

> Peace! peace!
> Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
> That sucks the nurse to sleep?—

These few words—the contrast between the tender beauty of the image and the horror of the situation—produce an effect more intensely mournful than all the ranting in the world. The generous devotion of her women adds the moral charm which alone was wanting: and when Octavius hurries in too late to save his victim, and exclaims when gazing on her—

> She looks like sleep—
> As she would catch another Antony
> In her strong toil of grace,

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the image of her beauty and her irresistible arts, triumphant even in death, is at once brought before us, and one masterly and comprehensive stroke consummates this most wonderful, most dazzling delineation.

I am not here the apologist of Cleopatra's historical character, nor of such women as resemble her: I am considering her merely as a dramatic portrait of astonishing beauty, spirit, and originality. She has furnished the subject of two Latin, sixteen French, six English, and, at least, four Italian tragedies;[1] yet Shakspeare alone has availed himself of all the interest of the story, without falsifying the character. He alone has dared to exhibit the

[1] The Cleopatra of Jodelle was the first regular French tragedy: the last French tragedy on the same subject was the Cléopatre of Marmontel. For the representation of this tragedy, Vaucanson, the celebrated French mechanist, invented an automaton asp, which crawled and hissed to the life,—to the great delight of the Parisians. But it appears that neither Vaucanson's asp, nor Clairon, could save Cléopatre from a deserved fate. Of the English tragedies, one was written by the Countess of Pembroke, the sister of Sir Philip Sydney; and is, I believe, the first instance in our language of original dramatic writing by a female.

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Egyptian queen with all her greatness and all her littleness—all her frailties of temper —all her paltry arts and dissolute passions yet preserved the dramatic propriety and poetical colouring of the character, and awakened our pity for fallen grandeur, without once beguiling us into sympathy with guilt and error. Corneille has represented Cleopatra as a model of chaste propriety, magnanimity, constancy, and every female virtue; and the effect is almost ludicrous. In our own language, we have two very fine tragedies on the story of Cleopatra: in that of Dryden, which is in truth a noble poem, and which he himself considered his master-piece, Cleopatra is a mere common-place "all for love" heroine, full of constancy and fine sentiments. For instance:—

My love 's so true,
That I can neither hide it where it is,
Nor show it where it is not. Nature meant me
A wife—a silly, harmless, household dove,
Fond without art, and kind without deceit.
But fortune that has made a mistress of me,
Has thrust me out to the wild world, unfurnished
Of falsehood to be happy.

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Is this Antony's Cleopatra—the Circe of the Nile—the Venus of Cydnus? *She* never uttered anything half so mawkish in her life.

In Fletcher's "False One," Cleopatra is represented at an earlier period of her history: and to give an idea of the aspect under which the character is exhibited (and it does not vary throughout the play), I shall give one scene: if it be considered out of place, its extreme beauty will form its best apology.

Ptolomy and his council having exhibited to Cæsar all the royal treasures in Egypt, he is so astonished and dazzled at the view of the accumulated wealth, that he forgets the presence of Cleopatra, and treats her with negligence. The following scene between her and her sister Arsinoe occurs immediately afterwards.

ARSINOE.

You 're so impatient!

CLEOPATRA.

Have I not cause?

Women of common beauties and low births,

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When they are slighted, are allowed their angers—
Why should not I, a princess, make him know
The baseness of his usage?

ARSINOE.

Yes, 't is fit:
But then again you know what man ——

CLEOPATRA.

He 's no man!
The shadow of a greatness hangs upon him,
And not the virtue; he is no conqueror,
Has suffered under the base dross of nature;
Poorly deliver'd up his power to wealth.
The god of bed-rid men taught his eyes treason:
Against the truth of love he has rais'd rebellion—
Defied his holy flames.

EROS.

He will fall back again,
And satisfy your grace.

CLEOPATRA.

Had I been old,
Or blasted in my bud, he might have shew'd
Some shadow of dislike: but to prefer
The lustre of a little trash, Arsinoe,
And the poor glow-worm light of some faint jewels
Before the light of love, and soul of beauty—
O how it vexes me! He is no soldier:
All honourable soldiers are Love's servants.

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He is a merchant, a mere wandering merchant,
Servile to gain; he trades for poor commodities,
And makes his conquests, thefts! Some fortunate captains
That quarter with him, and are truly valiant,
Have flung the name of "Happy Cæsar" on him;
Himself ne'er won it. He's so base and covetous,
He'll sell his sword for gold.

ARSINOE.

This is too bitter.

CLEOPATRA.

O I could curse myself, that was so foolish,
So fondly childish, to believe his tongue—
His promising tongue—ere I could catch his temper.
I'd trash enough to have cloy'd his eyes withal
(His covetous eyes), such as I scorn to tread on,
Richer than e'er he saw yet, and more tempting;
Had I known he'd stoop'd at that, I'd sav'd mine honour—
I had been happy still! But let him take it.
And let him brag how poorly I'm rewarded;
Let him go conquer still weak wretched ladies;
Love has his angry quiver too, his deadly,
And when he finds scorn, armed at the strongest—
I am a fool to fret thus for a fool,—
An old blind fool too! I lose my health; I will not,
I will not cry; I will not honour him
With tears diviner than the gods he worships;
I will not take the pains to curse a poor thing.

EROS.

Do not; you shall not need.

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CLEOPATRA.

Would I were a prisoner
To one I hate, that I might anger him!
I will love any man to break the heart of him!
Any that has the heart and will to kill him!

ARSINOE.

Take some fair truce.

CLEOPATRA.

I will go study mischief,
And put a look on, arm'd with all my cunnings,
Shall meet him like a basilisk, and strike him.
Love! put destroying flame into mine eyes,
Into my smiles deceits, that I may torture him—
That I may make him love to death, and laugh at him!

Enter APOLLODORUS.

APOLLODORUS.

Cæsar commends his service to your grace.

CLEOPATRA.

His service? What's his service?

EROS.

Pray you be patient;
The noble Cæsar loves still.

CLEOPATRA.

What's his will?

APOLLODORUS.

He craves access unto your highness.

CLEOPATRA.

No;—
Say no; I will have none to trouble me.

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ARSINOE.

Good sister!—

CLEOPATRA.

None, I say; I will be private.
Would thou hadst flung me into Nilus, keeper,
When first thou gav'st consent to bring my body
To this unthankful Cæsar!

APOLLODORUS.

'Twas your will, madam.
Nay more, your charge upon me, as I honour'd you.
You know what danger I endur'd.

CLEOPATRA.

Take this, *(giving a jewel.)*
And carry it to that lordly Cæsar sent thee;
There's a new love, a handsome one, a rich one,—
One that will hug his mind: bid him make love to it;
Tell the ambitious broker this will suffer ——

Enter CÆSAR.

APOLLODORUS.

He enters.

CLEOPATRA.

How!

CÆSAR.

I do not use to wait, lady;
Where I am, all the doors are free and open.

CLEOPATRA.

I guess so by your rudeness.

CÆSAR.

You're not angry?

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Things of your tender mould should be most gentle.
Why should you frown? Good gods, what a set anger
Have you forc'd into your face! Come, I must temper you.
What a coy smile was there, and a disdainful!
How like an ominous flash it broke out from you!
Defend me, love! Sweet, who has anger'd you?

CLEOPATRA.

Show him a glass! That false face has betray'd me—
That base heart wrong'd me!

CÆSAR.

Be more sweetly angry.
I wrong'd you, fair?

CLEOPATRA.

Away with your foul flatteries;
They are too gross! But that I dare be angry,
And with as great a god as Cæsar is,
To show how poorly I respect his memory,
I would not speak to you.

CÆSAR.

Pray you, undo this riddle,
And tell me how I've vex'd you.

CLEOPATRA.

Let me think first,
Whether I may put on a patience
That will with honour suffer me. Know I hate you;
Let that begin the story. Now I'll tell you.

CÆSAR.

But do it mildly: in a noble lady,

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Softness of spirit, and a sober nature,
That moves like summer winds, cool, and blows sweetness,
Shows blessed, like herself.

CLEOPATRA.

And that great blessedness
You first reap'd of me; till you taught my nature,
Like a rude storm, to talk aloud and thunder,
Sleep was not gentler than my soul, and stiller.
You had the spring of my affections,
And my fair fruits I gave you leave to taste of;
You must expect the winter of mine anger.
You flung me off—before the court disgraced me—
When in the pride I appear'd of all my beauty—
Appear'd your mistress; took unto your eyes
The common strumpet, love of hated lucre,—
Courted with covetous heart the slave of nature,—
Gave all your thoughts to gold, that men of glory,
And minds adorn'd with noble love, would kick at!
Soldiers of royal mark scorn such base purchase;
Beauty and honour are the marks they shoot at.
I spake to you then, I courted you, and woo'd you,
Call'd you dear Cæsar, hung about you tenderly,
Was proud to appear your friend—

CÆSAR.

You have mistaken me.

CLEOPATRA.

But neither eye, nor favour, not a smile
Was I blessed back withal, but shook off rudely;
And as you had been sold to sordid infamy,
You fell before the images of treasure,

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And in your soul you worshipp'd. I stood slighted,
Forgotten, and contemn'd; my soft embraces,
And those sweet kisses which you call'd Elysium,
As letters writ in sand, no more remember'd;
The name and glory of your Cleopatra
Laugh'd at, and made a story to your captains!
Shall I endure?

CÆSAR.

You are deceived in all this;
Upon my life you are; 'tis your much tenderness.

CLEOPATRA.

No, no; I love not that way; you are cozen'd;
I love with as much ambition as a conqueror,
And where I love will triumph!

CÆSAR.

So you shall:
My heart shall be the chariot that shall bear you:
All I have won shall wait upon you. By the gods,
The bravery of this woman's mind has fir'd me!
Dear mistress, shall I but this once ——

CLEOPATRA.

How! Cæsar!
Have I let slip a second vanity
That gives thee hope?

CÆSAR.

You shall be absolute,
And reign alone as queen; you shall be any thing.

CLEOPATRA.

* * * * *

Farewell, unthankful!

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CÆSAR.

Stay!

CLEOPATRA.

I will not.

CÆSAR.

I command.

CLEOPATRA.

Command, and go without, sir,
I do command *thee* be my slave for ever,
And vex, while I laugh at thee!

CÆSAR.

Thus low, beauty —— [*He kneels.*

CLEOPATRA.

It is too late; when I have found thee absolute,
The man that fame reports thee, and to me,
May be I shall think better. Farewell, conqueror!
[*Exit.*

Now this is magnificent poetry, but this is not Cleopatra, this is not "the gipsy queen." The sentiment here is too profound, the majesty too real, and too lofty. Cleopatra could be great by fits and starts, but never sustained her dignity upon so high a tone for ten minutes together. The Cleopatra of Fletcher reminds us of the antique colossal statue of her in the Vatican,

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all grandeur and grace. Cleopatra in Dryden's tragedy is like Guido's dying Cleopatra in the Pitti palace, tenderly beautiful. Shakspeare's Cleopatra is like one of those graceful and fantastic pieces of antique Arabesque, in which all anomalous shapes and impossible and wild combinations of form are woven together in regular confusion and most harmonious discord: and such, we have reason to believe, was the living woman herself, when she existed upon this earth.

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I do not understand the observation of a late critic, that in this play "Octavia is only a dull foil to Cleopatra." Cleopatra requires no foil, and Octavia is not dull, though in a moment of jealous spleen, her accomplished rival gives her that epithet.[1] It is possible that her beautiful character, if brought more forward and coloured up to the historic portrait, would still be eclipsed by the dazzling splendour of Cleopatra's; for so I have seen a flight of fireworks blot out for awhile the silver moon and ever burning stars. But here the subject of the drama being the love of Antony and Cleopatra, Octavia is very properly kept in the back ground, and far from any competition with her rival: the interest would otherwise have been unpleasantly divided, or rather, Cleopatra herself must have served but as a foil to the tender, virtuous, dignified, and generous Octavia, the very *beau idéal* of a noble Roman lady—

> Admired Octavia, whose beauty claims
> No worse a husband than the best of men;

[1] "The sober eye of dull Octavia."—Act v., scene 2.

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Whose virtue and whose general graces speak
That which none else can utter.

Dryden has committed a great mistake in bringing Octavia and her children on the scene, and in immediate contact with Cleopatra. To have thus violated the truth of history [1] might have been excusable, but to sacrifice the truth of nature and dramatic propriety, to produce a mere stage effect, was unpardonable. In order to preserve the unity of interest, he has falsified the character of Octavia as well as that of Cleopatra: [2] he has presented us with a regular

[1] Octavia was never in Egypt.

[2] "The Octavia of Dryden is a much more important personage than in the Antony and Cleopatra of Shakspeare. She is, however, more cold and unamiable, for in the very short scenes in which the Octavia of Shakspeare is introduced, she is placed in rather an interesting point of view. But Dryden has himself informed us, that he was apprehensive that the justice of a wife's claim would draw the audience to her side, and lessen their interest in the lover and the mistress. He seems, accordingly, to have studiously lowered the character of the injured Octavia, who, in her conduct to her husband, shows much duty and little love." Sir W. Scott (in the same fine piece of criticism prefixed to Dryden's All for Love) gives the preference to Shakspeare's Cleopatra.

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scolding match between the rivals, in which they come sweeping up to each other from opposite sides of the stage, with their respective trains, like two pea-hens in a passion. Shakspeare would no more have brought his captivating, brilliant, but meretricious Cleopatra into immediate comparison with the noble and chaste simplicity of Octavia, than a connoisseur in art would have placed Canova's Dansatrice, beautiful as it is, beside the Athenian Melpomene, or the Vestal of the Capitol.

The character of Octavia is merely indicated in a few touches, but every stroke tells. We see her with "downcast eyes sedate and sweet, and looks demure,"—with her modest tenderness and dignified submission—the very antipodes of her rival! Nor should we forget that she has furnished one of the most graceful similes in the whole compass of poetry, where her soft equanimity in the midst of grief is compared to

> The swan's down feather
> That stands upon the swell at flood of tide,
> And neither way inclines.

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The fear which seems to haunt the mind of Cleopatra, lest she should be "chastised by the sober eye" of Octavia, is exceedingly characteristic of the two women: it betrays the jealous pride of her, who was conscious that she had forfeited all real claim to respect; and it places Octavia before us in all the majesty of that virtue which could strike a kind of envying and remorseful awe even into the bosom of Cleopatra. What would she have thought and felt, had some soothsayer foretold to her the fate of her own children, whom she so tenderly loved? Captives, and exposed to the rage of the Roman populace, they owed their existence to the generous, admirable Octavia, in whose mind there entered no particle of littleness. She received into her house the children of Antony and Cleopatra, educated them with her own, treated them with truly maternal tenderness, and married them nobly.

Lastly, to complete the contrast, the death of Octavia should be put in comparison with that of Cleopatra.

After spending several years in dignified

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retirement, respected as the sister of Augustus, but more for her own virtues, Octavia lost her eldest son Marcellus, who was expressively called the "Hope of Rome." Her fortitude gave way under this blow, and she fell into a deep melancholy, which gradually wasted her health. While she was thus declining into death, occurred that beautiful scene, which has never yet, I believe, been made the subject of a picture, but should certainly be added to my gallery (if I had one), and I would hang it opposite to the dying Cleopatra. Virgil was commanded by Augustus to read aloud to his sister, that book of the Eneid in which he had commemorated the virtues and early death of the young Marcellus. When he came to the lines—

> This youth, the blissful vision of a day,
> Shall just be shown on earth, then snatch'd away, &c.

the mother covered her face, and burst into tears. But when Virgil mentioned her son by name ("Tu Marcellus eris"), which he had artfully deferred till the concluding

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lines, Octavia, unable to control her agitation, fainted away. She afterwards, with a magnificent spirit, ordered the poet a gratuity of ten thousand sesterces for each line of the panegyric.[1] It is probable that the agitation she suffered on this occasion hastened the effects of her disorder; for she died soon after (of grief, says the historian), having survived Antony about twenty years.

Octavia, however, is only a beautiful sketch, while in Volumnia, Shakspeare has given us the portrait of a Roman matron, conceived in the true antique spirit, and finished in every part. Although Coriolanus is the hero of the play, yet much of the interest of the action and the final catastrophe turn upon the character of his mother, Volumnia, and the power she exercised over his mind, by which, according to the story, "she saved Rome and lost her son." Her lofty patriotism, her patrician haughtiness, her maternal pride, her eloquence, and her towering spirit, are exhibited with the ut-

[1] In all, about two thousand pounds.

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most power of effect; yet the truth of female nature is beautifully preserved, and the portrait, with all its vigour, is without harshness.

I shall begin by illustrating the relative position and feelings of the mother and son; as these are of the greatest importance in the action of the drama, and consequently most prominent in the characters. Though Volumnia is a Roman matron, and though her country owes its salvation to her, it is clear that her maternal pride and affection are stronger even than her patriotism. Thus, when her son is exiled, she bursts into an imprecation against Rome and its citizens:

> Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome,
> And occupations perish!

Here we have the impulses of individual and feminine nature, overpowering all national and habitual influences. Volumnia would never have exclaimed like the Spartan mother, of her dead son, "Sparta has many others as brave as he:" but in a far different spirit she says to the Romans,

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Ere you go, hear this;
As far as doth the Capitol exceed
The meanest house in Rome, so far my son,
Whom you have banished, does exceed you all.

In the very first scene, and before the introduction of the principal personages, one citizen observes to another, that the military exploits of Marcius were performed, not so much for his country's sake "as to please his mother." By this admirable stroke of art, introduced with such simplicity of effect, our attention is aroused, and we are prepared in the very outset of the piece for the important part assigned to Volumnia, and for her share in producing the catastrophe.

In the first act we have a very graceful scene, in which the two Roman ladies, the wife and mother of Coriolanus, are discovered at their needlework, conversing on his absence and danger, and are visited by Valeria—

The noble sister of Publicola,
The moon of Rome; chaste as the icicle,
That 's curded by the frost from purest snow,
And hangs on Dian's temple!

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Over this little scene Shakspeare, without any display of learning, has breathed the very spirit of classical antiquity. The haughty temper of Volumnia, her admiration of the valour and high bearing of her son, and her proud but unselfish love for him, are finely contrasted with the modest sweetness, the conjugal tenderness, and the fond solicitude of his wife Virgilia.

VOLUMNIA.

When yet he was but tender-bodied, and the only son of my womb; when youth with comeliness pluck'd all gaze his way; when, for a day of king's entreaties, a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding; I,—considering how honour would become such a person; that it was no better than picture-like to hang by the wall, if renown made it not stir,—was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter—I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child, than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man.

VIRGILIA.

But had he died in the business, madam? how then?

VOLUMNIA.

Then his good report should have been my son; I therein

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would have found issue. Hear me profess sincerely: had I a dozen sons, each in my love alike, and none less dear than thine and my good Marcius, I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country, than one voluptuously surfeit out of action.

Enter a GENTLEWOMAN.

Madam, the lady Valeria is come to visit you.

VIRGILIA.

Beseech you, give me leave to retire myself.

VOLUMNIA.

Indeed you shall not.
Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum:
See him pluck Aufidius down by the hair;
As children from a bear, the Volces shunning him;
Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus—
"Come on, you cowards! you were got in fear,
Though you were born in Rome." His bloody brow
With his mail'd hand then wiping, forth he goes;
Like to a harvest-man, that 's task'd to mow
Or all, or lose his hire.

VIRGILIA.

His bloody brow! O Jupiter, no blood!

VOLUMNIA.

Away, you fool! it more becomes a man
Than gilt his trophy. The breasts of Hecuba,
When she did suckle Hector, look'd not lovelier
Than Hector's forehead, when it spit forth blood

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At Grecian swords contending. Tell Valeria
We are fit to bid her welcome. [*Exit Gent.*

VIRGILIA.

Heavens bless my lord from fell Aufidius!

VOLUMNIA.

He'll beat Aufidius' head below his knee,
And tread upon his neck.

This distinction between the two females is as interesting and beautiful as it is well sustained. Thus, when the victory of Coriolanus is proclaimed, Menenius asks, "Is he wounded?"

VIRGILIA.

O no, no, no!

VOLUMNIA.

Yes, he is wounded—I thank the gods for it!

And when he returns victorious from the wars, his high-spirited mother receives him with blessings and applause—his gentle wife with "gracious silence" and with tears.

The resemblance of temper in the mother and the son, modified as it is by the difference of sex, and by her greater age and

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experience, is exhibited with admirable truth. Volumnia, with all her pride and spirit, has some prudence and self-command: in her language and deportment all is matured and matronly. The dignified tone of authority she assumes towards her son, when checking his headlong impetuosity, her respect and admiration for his noble qualities, and her strong sympathy even with the feelings she combats, are all displayed in the scene in which she prevails on him to soothe the incensed plebeians.

VOLUMNIA.

Pray be counsell'd:
I have a heart as little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage.

MENENIUS.

Well said, noble woman:
Before he should thus stoop to the herd, but that
The violent fit o' the time craves it as physic
For the whole state, I would put mine armour on,
Which I can scarcely bear.

CORIOLANUS.

What must I do?

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MENENIUS.

Return to the tribunes.

CORIOLANUS.

Well,
What then? what then?

MENENIUS.

Repent what you have spoke.

CORIOLANUS.

For them? I cannot do it to the gods:
Must I then do't to them?

VOLUMNIA.

You are too absolute;
Though therein you can never be too noble,
But when extremities speak.

I pr'ythee now, my son,
Go to them, with this bonnet in thy hand;
And thus far having stretch'd it (here be with them),
Thy knee bussing the stones (for in such business
Action is eloquent, and the eyes of the ignorant
More learned than the ears), waving thy head,
Which often, thus, correcting thy stout heart,
Now humble, as the ripest mulberry,
That will not hold the handling. Or, say to them,
Thou art their soldier, and being bred in broils
Hast not the soft way which, thou dost confess,
Were fit for thee to use, as they to claim,
In asking their good loves; but thou wilt frame

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Thyself, forsooth, hereafter theirs, so far
As thou hast power and person.

MENENIUS.

This but done,
Even as she speaks, why all their hearts were yours;
For they have pardons, being asked, as free
As words to little purpose.

VOLUMNIA.

Pr'ythee now,
Go, and be rul'd: although I know thou hadst rather
Follow thine enemy in a fiery gulf
Than flatter him in a bower.

MENENIUS.

Only fair speech.

COMINIUS.

I think 't will serve, if he
Can thereto frame his spirit.

VOLUMNIA.

He must, and will:
Pr'ythee, now say you will, and go about it.

CORIOLANUS.

Must I go show them my unbarb'd sconce? Must I
With my base tongue give to my noble heart
A lie, that it must bear? Well, I will do 't?
Yet were there but this single plot to lose,
This mould of Marcius, they to dust should grind it,
And throw it against the wind. To the market-place!

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You have put me now to such a part, which never
I shall discharge to the life.

VOLUMNIA.

I pr'ythee now, sweet son, as thou hast said,
My praises made thee first a soldier, so
To have my praise for this, perform a part
Thou hast not done before.

CORIOLANUS.

Well, I must do 't;
Away, my disposition, and possess me
Some harlot's spirit!

* * * *

I will not do 't;
Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
And, by my body's action, teach my mind
A most inherent baseness.

VOLUMNIA.

At thy choice, then:
To beg of thee, it is my more dishonour,
Than thou of them. Come all to ruin: let
Thy mother rather feel thy pride, than fear
Thy dangerous stoutness: for I mock at death
With as big heart as thou. Do as thou list—
Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me;
But owe thy pride thyself.

CORIOLANUS.

Pray be content;
Mother, I am going to the market-place—
Chide me no more.

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When the spirit of the mother and the son are brought into immediate collision, he yields before her: the warrior who stemmed alone the whole city of Corioli, who was ready to face "the steep Tarpeian death, or at wild horses' heels,—vagabond exile—flaying," rather than abate one jot of his proud will—shrinks at her rebuke. The haughty, fiery, overbearing temperament of Coriolanus, is drawn in such forcible and striking colours, that nothing can more impress us with the real grandeur and power of Volumnia's character, than his boundless submission to her will—his more than filial tenderness and respect.

> You gods! I prate,
> And the most noble mother of the world
> Leave unsaluted. Sink my knee i' the earth—
> Of thy deep duty more impression show
> Than that of common sons!

When his mother appears before him as a suppliant, he exclaims,

> My mother bows;
> As if Olympus to a molehill should
> In supplication nod.

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Here the expression of reverence, and the magnificent image in which it is clothed, are equally characteristic both of the mother and the son.

Her aristocratic haughtiness is a strong trait in Volumnia's manner and character, and her supreme contempt for the plebeians, whether they are to be defied or cajoled, is very like what I have heard expressed by some high-born and high-bred women of our own day.

> I muse my mother
> Does not approve me further, who was wont
> To call them woollen vassals; things created
> To buy and sell with groats; to show bare heads
> In congregations; to yawn, be still, and wonder,
> When one but of my ordinance stood up
> To speak of peace or war.

And Volumnia reproaching the tribunes,

> 'T was you incensed the rabble—
> Cats, that can judge as fitly of his worth,
> As I can of those mysteries which Heaven
> Will not have earth to know.

There is all the Roman spirit in her ex-

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ultation when the trumpets sound the return of Coriolanus.

> Hark! the trumpets!
> These are the ushers of Marcius: before him
> He carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears.

And in her speech to the gentle Virgilia, who is weeping her husband's banishment—

> Leave this faint puling! and lament as I do,
> In anger—Juno-like!

But the triumph of Volumnia's character, the full display of all her grandeur of soul, her patriotism, her strong affections, and her sublime eloquence, are reserved for her last scene, in which she pleads for the safety of Rome, and wins from her angry son that peace which all the swords of Italy and her confederate arms could not have purchased. The strict and even literal adherence to the truth of history is an additional beauty.

Her famous speech, beginning "Should we be silent and not speak," is nearly word for word from Plutarch, with some addi-

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tional graces of expression, and the charm of metre superadded. I shall give the last lines of this address, as illustrating that noble and irresistible eloquence which was the crowning ornament of the character. One exquisite touch of nature, which is distinguished by italics, was beyond the rhetorician and historian, and belongs only to the poet.

Speak to me, son;
Thou hast affected the fine strains of honour,
To imitate the graces of the gods;
To tear with thunder the wide cheeks o' the air,
And yet to charge thy sulphur with a bolt
That should but rive an oak. Why dost not speak?
Think'st thou it honourable for a noble man
Still to remember wrongs? Daughter, speak you:
He cares not for your weeping. Speak thou, boy;
Perhaps thy childishness may move him more
Than can our reasons. There is no man in the world
More bound to his mother; yet here he lets me prate
Like one i' the stocks. Thou hast never in thy life
Show'd thy dear mother any courtesy;
When she, (poor hen!) fond of no second brood,
Has cluck'd thee to the wars, and safely home,
Laden with honour. Say my request 's unjust,
And spurn me back; but, if it be not so,

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Thou art not honest, and the gods will plague thee
That thou restrain'st from me the duty which
To a mother's part belongs. He turns away:
Down, ladies: let us shame him with our knees.
To his surname Coriolanus 'longs more pride,
Than pity to our prayers; down, and end;
This is the last; so will we home to Rome,
And die among our neighbours. Nay, behold us;
This boy, that cannot tell what he would have,
But kneels, and holds up hands, for fellowship,
Does reason our petition with more strength
Than thou hast to deny 't.[1]

[1] The corresponding passage in the old English Plutarch runs thus:—"My son, why dost thou not answer me? Dost thou think it good altogether to give place unto thy choler and revenge, and thinkest thou it not honesty for thee to grant thy mother's request in so weighty a cause? Dost thou take it honourable for a nobleman to remember the wrongs and injuries done him, and dost not in like case think it an honest nobleman's part to be thankful for the goodness that parents do show to their children, acknowledging the duty and reverence they ought to bear unto them? No man living is more bound to show himself thankful in all parts and respects than thyself, who so universally showest all ingratitude. Moreover, my son, thou hast sorely taken of thy country, exacting grievous payments upon them in revenge of the injuries offered thee; besides, thou hast not hitherto showed thy poor mother any courtesy. And, therefore, it is not only honest, but due unto me, that without compulsion I should obtain my so just and reasonable request of thee. But since by reason

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It is an instance of Shakspeare's fine judgment, that after this magnificent and touching piece of eloquence, which saved Rome, Volumnia should speak no more, for she could say nothing that would not deteriorate from the effect thus left on the imagination. She is at last dismissed from our admiring gaze amid the thunder of grateful acclamations—

Behold our patroness—the life of Rome.

I cannot persuade ye to it, to what purpose do I defer my last hope?" And with these words, herself, his wife, and children, fell down upon their knees before him.

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CONSTANCE.

We have seen that in the mother of Coriolanus, the principal qualities are exceeding pride, self-will, strong maternal affection, great power of imagination, and energy of temper. Precisely the same qualities enter

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into the mind of Constance of Bretagne: but in her these qualities are so differently modified by circumstances and education, that not even in fancy do we think of instituting a comparison between the gothic grandeur of Constance, and the more severe and classical dignity of the Roman matron.

The scenes and circumstances with which Shakspeare has surrounded Constance are strictly faithful to the old chronicles, and are as vividly as they are accurately represented. On the other hand, the hints on which the character has been constructed are few and vague: but the portrait harmonizes so wonderfully with its historic back-ground, and with all that later researches have discovered relative to the personal adventures of Constance, that I have not the slightest doubt of its individual truth. The result of a life of strange vicissitude; the picture of a tameless will, and high passions, for ever struggling in vain against a superior power: and the real situation of women it those chivalrous

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times, are placed before us in a few noble scenes. The manner in which Shakspeare has applied the scattered hints of history to the formation of the character, reminds us of that magician who collected the mangled limbs which had been dispersed up and down, re-united them into the human form, and re-animated them with the breathing and conscious spirit of life.

Constance of Bretagne was the only daughter and heiress of Conan IV., Duke of Bretagne; her mother was Margaret of Scotland, the eldest daughter of Malcolm IV.: but little mention is made of this princess in the old histories; but she appears to have inherited some portion of the talent and spirit of her father, and to have transmitted them to her daughter. The misfortunes of Constance may be said to have commenced before her birth, and took their rise in the misconduct of one of her female ancestors. Her great-grandmother Matilda, the wife of Conan III., was distinguished by her beauty and imperious temper, and not less by her gallantries. Her husband,

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not thinking proper to repudiate her during his lifetime, contented himself with disinheriting her son Hoel, whom he declared illegitimate; and bequeathed his dukedom to his daughter Bertha, and her husband Allan the Black, Earl of Richmond, who were proclaimed and acknowledged Duke and Duchess of Bretagne.

Prince Hoel, so far from acquiescing in his father's will, immediately levied an army to maintain his rights, and a civil war ensued between the brother and sister, which lasted for twelve or fourteen years. Bertha, whose reputation was not much fairer than that of her mother Matilda, was succeeded by her son Conan IV.; he was young, and of a feeble, vacillating temper, and after struggling for a few years against the increasing power of his uncle Hoel, and his own rebellious barons, he called in the aid of that politic and ambitious monarch, Henry II. of England. This fatal step decided the fate of his crown and his posterity; from the moment the English set foot in Bretagne, that miserable country

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became a scene of horrors and crimes—oppression and perfidy on the one hand, unavailing struggles on the other. Ten years of civil discord ensued, during which the greatest part of Bretagne was desolated, and nearly a third of the population carried off by famine and pestilence. In the end, Conan was secured in the possession of his throne by the assistance of the English king, who, equally subtle and ambitious, contrived in the course of this warfare to strip Conan of most of his provinces by successive treaties; alienate the Breton nobles from their lawful sovereign, and at length render the Duke himself the mere vassal of his power.

In the midst of these scenes of turbulence and bloodshed was Constance born, in the year 1164. The English king consummated his perfidious scheme of policy, by seizing on the person of the infant princess, before she was three years old, as a hostage for her father. Afterwards, by contracting her in marriage to his third son, Geoffrey Plantagenet, he ensured, as he thought,

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the possession of the duchy of Bretagne to his own posterity.

From this time, we hear no more of the weak, unhappy Conan, who, retiring from a fruitless contest, hid himself in some obscure retreat: even the date of his death is unknown. Meanwhile Henry openly claimed the duchy in behalf of his son Geoffrey and the Lady Constance; and their claims not being immediately acknowledged he invaded Bretagne with a large army, laid waste the country, bribed or forced some of the barons into submission, murdered or imprisoned others, and, by the most treacherous and barbarous policy, contrived to keep possession of the country he had thus seized. However, in order to satisfy the Bretons, who were attached to the race of their ancient sovereigns, and to give some colour to his usurpation, he caused Geoffrey and Constance to be solemnly crowned at Rennes, as Duke and Duchess of Bretagne. This was in the year 1169, when Constance was five, and Prince Geoffrey about eight years old.

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His father, Henry, continued to rule, or rather to ravage and oppress the country in their name for about fourteen years, during which period we do not hear of Constance. She appears to have been kept in a species of constraint as a hostage rather than a sovereign; while her husband Geoffrey, as he grew up to manhood, was too much engaged in keeping the Bretons in order, and disputing his rights with his father, to think about the completion of his union with Constance, although his sole title to the dukedom was properly and legally in right of his wife. At length, in 1182, the nuptials were formally celebrated, Constance being then in her nineteenth year. At the same time, she was recognised as Duchess of Bretagne *de son chef* (that is, in her own right), by two acts of legislation, which are still preserved among the records of Bretagne, and bear her own seal and signature.

Those domestic feuds which embittered the whole life of Henry II., and at length broke his heart, are well known. Of all

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his sons, who were in continual rebellion against him, Geoffrey was the most undutiful, and the most formidable: he had all the pride of the Plantagenets,—all the warlike accomplishments of his two elder brothers, Henry and Richard; and was the only one who could compete with his father in talent, eloquence, and dissimulation. No sooner was he the husband of Constance, and in possession of the throne of Bretagne, than he openly opposed his father; in other words, he maintained the honour and interests of his wife and her unhappy country against the cruelties and oppression of the English plunderers.[1] About three years after his marriage, he was invited to Paris for the purpose of concluding a league, offensive and defensive, with the French king: in this journey he was accompanied by the Duchess Constance, and they were received and entertained with royal magnificence. Geoffrey, who excelled in all chivalrous accomplishments, distinguished himself in the tournaments which were cele-

[1] V. Daru, Histoire de Bretagne.

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brated on the occasion; but unfortunately, after an encounter with a French knight, celebrated for his prowess, he was accidentally flung from his horse, and trampled to death in the lists before he could be extricated.

Constance, being now left a widow, returned to Bretagne, where her barons rallied round her, and acknowledged her as their sovereign. The Salique law did not prevail in Bretagne, and it appears that in those times the power of a female to possess and transmit the rights of sovereignty had been recognised in several instances; but Constance is the first woman who exercised those rights in her own person. She had one daughter, Elinor, born in the second year of her marriage, and a few months after her husband's death she gave birth to a son. The states of Bretagne were filled with exultation; they required that the infant prince should not bear the name of his father,—a name which Constance, in fond remembrance of her husband, would have bestowed on him,—still less that of his grandfather Henry; but that of Arthur, the

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redoubted hero of their country, whose memory was worshipped by the populace. Though the Arthur of romantic and fairy legends—the Arthur of the round table, had been dead for six centuries, they still looked for his second appearance among them, according to the prophecy of Merlin; and now, with fond and short-sighted enthusiasm, fixed their hopes on the young Arthur as one destined to redeem the glory and independence of their oppressed and miserable country. But in the very midst of the rejoicings which succeeded the birth of the prince, his grandfather, Henry II., demanded to have the possession and guardianship of his person; and on the spirited refusal of Constance to yield her son into his power, he invaded Bretagne with a large army, plundering, burning, devastating the country as he advanced, he seized Rennes, the capital; and having by the basest treachery obtained possession of the persons both of the young duchess and her children, he married Constance forcibly to one of his own favourite adherents, Randal de Blonde-

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ville, Earl of Chester, and conferred on him the duchy of Bretagne, to be held as a fief of the English crown.

The Earl of Chester, though a brave knight, and one of the greatest barons of England, had no pretensions to so high an alliance; nor did he possess any qualities or personal accomplishments which might have reconciled Constance to him as a husband. He was a man of diminutive stature and mean appearance, but of haughty and ferocious manners, and unbounded ambition.[1] In a conference between this Earl of Chester and the Earl of Perche, in Lincoln cathedral, the latter taunted Randal with his insignificant person, and called him contemptuously, "*Dwarf.*" "Sayst thou so!" replied Randal; "I vow to God and our Lady, whose church this is, that ere long I will seem to thee high as that steeple!" He was as good as his word, when, on ascending the throne of Brittany, the Earl of Perche became his vassal.

[1] V. Sir Peter Leycester's Antiquities of Chester.

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We cannot know what measures were used to force this degradation on the reluctant and high-spirited Constance; it is only certain that she never considered her marriage in the light of a sacred obligation, and that she took the first opportunity of legally breaking from a chain which could scarcely be considered as legally binding. For about a year she was obliged to allow this detested husband the title of Duke of Bretagne, and he administered the government without the slightest reference to her will, even in form, till 1189, when Henry II. died, execrating himself and his undutiful children. Whatever great and good qualities this monarch may have possessed, his conduct in Bretagne was uniformly detestable. Even the unfilial behaviour of his sons may be extenuated; for while he spent his life, and sacrificed his peace, and violated every principle of honour and humanity to compass their political aggrandisement, he was guilty of atrocious injustice towards them, and set them a bad example in his own person.

The tidings of Henry's death had no

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sooner reached Bretagne than the barons of that country rose with one accord against his government, banished or massacred his officers, and, sanctioned by the Duchess Constance, drove Randal de Blondeville and his followers from Bretagne: he retired to his earldom of Chester, there to brood over his injuries, and meditate vengeance.

In the meantime, Richard I. ascended the English throne. Soon afterwards he embarked on his celebrated expedition to the Holy Land, having previously declared Prince Arthur, the only son of Constance, heir to all his dominions.[1]

His absence, and that of many of her own turbulent barons and encroaching neighbours, left to Constance and her harassed dominions a short interval of profound peace. The historians of that period, occupied by the warlike exploits of the French and English kings in Palestine, make but little mention of the domestic events of Europe during their absence; but it is no slight encomium on the character of Constance, that Bretagne

[1] By the treaty of Messina, 1190.

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flourished under her government, and began to recover from the effects of twenty years of desolating war. The seven years during which she ruled as an independent sovereign, were not marked by any events of importance; but in the year 1196 she caused her son Arthur, then nine years of age, to be acknowledged Duke of Bretagne by the States, and associated him with herself in all the acts of government.

There was more of maternal fondness than policy in this measure, and it cost her dear. Richard, that royal firebrand, had now returned to England: by the intrigues and representations of Earl Randal, his attention was turned to Bretagne. He expressed extreme indignation that Constance should have proclaimed her son Duke of Bretagne, and her partner in power, without his consent, he being the feudal lord and natural guardian of the young prince. After some excuses and representations on the part of Constance, he affected to be pacified, and a friendly interview was appointed at Pontorson, on the frontiers of Normandy.

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We can hardly reconcile the cruel and perfidious scenes which follow with those romantic and chivalrous associations which illustrate the memory of Cœur-de-Lion—the friend of Blondel, and the antagonist of Saladin. Constance, perfectly unsuspicious of the meditated treason, accepted the invitation of her brother-in-law, and set out from Rennes with a small but magnificent retinue to join him at Pontorson. On the road, and within sight of the town, the Earl of Chester was posted with a troop of Richard's soldiery, and while the Duchess prepared to enter the gates, where she expected to be received with honour and welcome, he suddenly rushed from his ambuscade, fell upon her and her suite, put the latter to flight, and carried off Constance to the strong castle of St. Jaques de Beuvron, where he detained her a prisoner for eighteen months. The chronicle does not tell us how Randal treated his unfortunate wife during this long imprisonment. She was absolutely in his power; none of her own people suffered to approach her, and whatever might have been his be-

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haviour towards her, one thing alone is certain, that so far from softening her feelings towards *him*, it seems to have added tenfold bitterness to her abhorrence and her scorn.

The barons of Bretagne sent the Bishop of Rennes to complain of this violation of faith and justice, and to demand the restitution of the Duchess. Richard meanly evaded and temporized: he engaged to restore Constance to liberty on certain conditions; but this was merely to gain time. When the stipulated terms were complied with, and the hostages delivered, the Bretons sent a herald to the English king, to require him to fulfil his part of the treaty, and restore their beloved Constance. Richard replied with insolent defiance, refused to deliver up either the hostages or Constance, and marched his army into the heart of the country.

All that Bretagne had suffered previously was as nothing compared to this terrible invasion; and all that the humane and peaceful government of Constance had effected during seven years was at once

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annihilated. The English barons and their savage and mercenary followers spread themselves through the country, which they wasted with fire and sword. The castles of those who ventured to defend themselves were razed to the ground; the towns and villages plundered and burnt, and the wretched inhabitants fled to the caves and forests; but not even there could they find an asylum: by the orders, and in the presence of Richard, the woods were set on fire, and hundreds either perished in the flames, or were suffocated in the smoke.

Constance, meanwhile, could only weep in her captivity over the miseries of her country, and tremble with all a mother's fears for the safety of her son. She had placed Arthur under the care of William Desroches, the seneschal of her palace, a man of mature age, of approved valour, and devotedly attached to her family. This faithful servant threw himself, with his young charge, into the fortress of Brest, where he for some time defied the power of the English king.

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But notwithstanding the brave resistance of the nobles and people of Bretagne, they were obliged to submit to the conditions imposed by Richard. By a treaty concluded in 1198, of which the terms are not exactly known, Constance was delivered from her captivity, though not from her husband; but in the following year, when the death of Richard had restored her to some degree of independence, the first use she made of it was to *divorce herself* from Randal. She took this step with her usual precipitancy, not waiting for the sanction of the Pope, as was the custom in those days; and soon afterwards she gave her hand to Guy, Count de Thouars, a man of courage and integrity, who for some time maintained the cause of his wife and her son against the power of England. Arthur was now fourteen, and the legitimate heir of all the dominions of his uncle Richard. Constance placed him under the guardianship of the king of France, who knighted the young prince with his own hand, and solemnly swore to defend his rights against his usurping uncle John.

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It is at this moment that the play of King John opens; and history is followed as closely as the dramatic form would allow, to the death of John. The real fate of poor Arthur, after he had been abandoned by the French, and had fallen into the hands of his uncle, is now ascertained; but according to the chronicle from which Shakspeare drew his materials, he was killed in attempting to escape from the castle of Falaise. Constance did not live to witness this consummation of her calamities; within a few months after Arthur was taken prisoner, in 1201, she died suddenly, before she had attained her thirty-ninth year; but the cause of her death is not specified.

Her eldest daughter Elinor, the legitimate heiress of England, Normandy, and Bretagne, died in captivity; having been kept a prisoner in Bristol Castle from the age of fifteen. She was at that time so beautiful, that she was called proverbially, "La belle Bretonne," and by the English the "Fair Maid of Brittany." She, like her brother

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Arthur, was sacrificed to the ambition of her uncles.

Of the two daughters of Constance by Guy de Thouars, the eldest, Alice, became Duchess of Bretagne, and married the Count de Dreux, of the royal blood of France. The sovereignty of Bretagne was transmitted through her descendants in an uninterrupted line, till, by the marriage of the celebrated Anne de Bretagne with Charles VIII. of France, her dominions were for ever united with the French monarchy.

In considering the real history of Constance, three things must strike us as chiefly remarkable.

First, that she is not accused of any vice, or any act of injustice or violence; and this praise, though poor and negative, should have its due weight, considering the scanty records that remain of her troubled life, and the period at which she lived—a period in which crimes of the darkest dye were familiar occurrences. Her father, Conan, was considered as a gentle and amiable prince—"gentle even to feebleness;" yet we are told that on one occasion he acted

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over again the tragedy of Ugolino and Ruggiero, when he shut up the Count de Dol, with his two sons and his nephew, in a dungeon, and deliberately starved them to death; an event recorded without any particular comment by the old chroniclers of Bretagne. It also appears that, during those intervals when Constance administered the government of her states with some degree of independence, the country prospered under her sway; and that she possessed at all times the love of her people and the respect of her nobles.

Secondly, no imputation whatever has been cast on the honour of Constance as a wife and as a woman. The old historians, who have treated in a very unceremonious style the levities of her great grandmother Matilda, her grandmother Bertha, her godmother Constance, and her mother-in-law Elinor, treat the name and memory of *our* Lady Constance with uniform respect.

Her third marriage, with Guy de Thouars, has been censured as impolitic, but has also been defended: it can hardly, considering

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her age, and the circumstances in which she was placed, be a just subject of reproach. During her hated union with Randal de Blondeville, and the years passed in a species of widowhood, she conducted herself with propriety: at least I can find no reason to judge otherwise.

Lastly, we are struck by the fearless, determined spirit, amounting at times to rashness, which Constance displayed on several occasions, when left to the free exercise of her own power and will; yet we see how frequently, with all this resolution and pride of temper, she became a mere instrument in the hands of others, and a victim to the superior craft or power of her enemies. The inference is unavoidable; there must have existed in the mind of Constance, with all her noble and amiable qualities, a deficiency somewhere,—a want of firmness, a want of judgment or wariness, and a total want of self-control.

* * * * *

In the play of King John, the three principal characters are the King, Falconbridge,

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and Lady Constance. The first is drawn forcibly and accurately from history; it reminds us of Titian's portrait of Cæsar Borgia, in which the hatefulness of the subject is redeemed by the masterly skill of the artist,—the truth, and power, and wonderful beauty of the execution. Falconbridge is the spirited creation of the poet.[1] Constance is certainly an historical personage; but the form which, when we meet it on the record of history, appears like a pale indistinct shadow, half melted into its obscure background, starts before us into a strange relief and palpable breathing reality upon the page of Shakspeare.

Whenever we think of Constance, it is in her maternal character. All the interest which she excites in the drama turns upon her situation as the mother of Arthur.

[1] Malone says, that "in expanding the character of the bastard, Shakspeare seems to have proceeded on the following slight hint in an old play on the story of King John:

Next them a bastard of the king's deceased—
A hardy wild-head, rough and venturous."

It is easy to *say* this; yet who but Shakspeare could have expanded the last line into a Falconbridge?

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Every circumstance in which she is placed, every sentiment she utters, has a reference to him; and she is represented through the whole of the scenes in which she is engaged, as alternately pleading for the rights, and trembling for the existence of her son.

The same may be said of the Merope. In the four tragedies of which her story forms the subject,[1] we see her but in one point of view, namely, as a mere impersonation of the maternal feeling. The poetry of the situation is everything, the character nothing. Interesting as she is, take Merope out of the circumstances in which she is placed,—take away her son, for whom she trembles from the first scene to the last, and Merope in herself is nothing; she melts away into a name, to which we can affix no other characteristic by which to distinguish her. We recognise

[1] The Greek Merope, which was esteemed one of the finest of the tragedies of Euripides, is unhappily lost; those of Maffei, Alfieri, and Voltaire, are well known. There is another Merope in Italian, which I have not seen: the English Merope is merely a bad translation from Voltaire.

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her no longer. Her position is that of an agonized mother; and we can no more fancy her under a different aspect, than we can imagine the statue of Niobe in a different attitude.

But while we contemplate the character of Constance, she assumes before us an individuality perfectly distinct from the circumstances around her. The action calls forth her maternal feelings, and places them in the most prominent point of view: but with Constance, as with a real human being, the maternal affections are a powerful instinct, modified by other faculties, sentiments, and impulses, making up the individual character. We think of her as a mother, because, as a mother distracted for the loss of her son, she is immediately presented before us, and calls forth our sympathy and our tears; but we infer the rest of her character from what we see, as certainly and as completely as if we had known her whole course of life.

That which strikes us as the principal attribute of Constance is *power*—power of imagination, of will, of passion, of affec-

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tion, of pride: the moral energy, that faculty which is principally exercised in self-control, and gives consistency to the rest, is deficient; or rather, to speak more correctly, the extraordinary development of sensibility and imagination, which lends to the character its rich poetical colouring, leaves the other qualities comparatively subordinate. Hence it is that the whole complexion of the character, notwithstanding its amazing grandeur, is so exquisitely feminine. The weakness of the woman, who by the very consciousness of that weakness is worked up to desperation and defiance—the fluctuations of temper, and the bursts of sublime passion, the terrors, the impatience, and the tears, are all most true to feminine nature. The energy of Constance not being based upon strength of character, rises and falls with the tide of passion. Her haughty spirit swells against resistance, and is excited into frenzy by sorrow and disappointment; while neither from her towering pride, nor her strength of intellect, can she borrow patience to submit, or fortitude to endure.

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It is, therefore, with perfect truth of nature that Constance is first introduced as pleading for peace.

> Stay for an answer to your embassy,
> Lest unadvised you stain your swords with blood:
> My Lord Chatillon may from England bring
> That right in peace, which here we urge in war;
> And then we shall repent each drop of blood,
> That hot, rash haste so indirectly shed.

And that the same woman, when all her passions are roused by the sense of injury, should afterwards exclaim,

> War, war! No peace! peace is to me a war!

That she should be ambitious for her son, proud of his high birth and royal rights, and violent in defending them, is most natural; but I cannot agree with those who think that in the mind of Constance, *ambition*—that is, the love of dominion for its own sake—is either a strong motive or a strong feeling: it could hardly be so where the natural impulses and the ideal power predominate in so high a degree. The vehemence with which she asserts the just and legal

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rights of her son is that of a fond mother and a proud-spirited woman, stung with the sense of injury, and herself a reigning sovereign,—by birth and right, if not in fact: yet when bereaved of her son, grief not only "fills the room up of her absent child," but seems to absorb every other faculty and feeling—even pride and anger. It is true that she exults over him as one whom nature and fortune had destined to be *great*, but in her distraction for his loss, she thinks of him only as her "Pretty Arthur."

> O lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son!
> My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!
> My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure!

No other feeling can be traced through the whole of her frantic scene: it is grief only, a mother's heart-rending, soul-absorbing grief, and nothing else. Not even indignation, or the desire of revenge, interfere with its soleness and intensity. An ambitious woman would hardly have thus addressed the cold, wily Cardinal:

> And, Father Cardinal, I have heard you say,
> That we shall see and know our friends in heaven:

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If that be true, I shall see my boy again;
For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,
To him that did but yesterday suspire,
There was not such a gracious creature born.
But now will canker sorrow eat my bud,
And chase the native beauty from his cheek,
And he will look as hollow as a ghost;
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit;
And so he'll die; and rising so again,
When I shall meet him in the court of heaven
I shall not know him: therefore never, never,
Must I behold my pretty Arthur more!

The bewildered pathos and poetry of this address could be natural in no woman, who did not unite, like Constance, the most passionate sensibility with the most vivid imagination.

It is true that Queen Elinor calls her on one occasion, "ambitious Constance;" but the epithet is rather the natural expression of Elinor's own fear and hatred than really applicable.[1] Elinor, in whom age had sub-

[1] "Queen Elinor saw that if he were king, how his mother Constance would look to bear the most rule in the realm of England, till her son should come to a lawful age to govern of himself."—HOLINSHED.

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dued all passions but ambition, dreaded the mother of Arthur as her rival in power, and for that reason only opposed the claims of the son: but I conceive, that in a woman yet in the prime of life, and endued with the peculiar disposition of Constance, the mere love of power would be too much modified by fancy and feeling to be called a *passion*.

In fact, it is not pride, nor temper, nor ambition, nor even maternal affection, which in Constance gives the prevailing tone to the whole character; it is the predominance of imagination. I do not mean in the conception of the dramatic portrait, but in the temperament of the woman herself. In the poetical, fanciful, excitable cast of her mind, in the *excess* of the ideal power, tinging all her affections, exalting all her sentiments and thoughts, and animating the expression of both, Constance can only be compared to Juliet.

In the first place, it is through the power of imagination that, when under the influence of excited temper, Constance is not a mere incensed woman: nor does she, in the

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style of Volumnia, "lament in anger, Juno-like," but rather like a sybil in a fury. Her sarcasms come down like thunderbolts. In her famous address to Austria—

O Lymoges! O Austria! thou dost shame
That bloody spoil! thou slave! thou wretch! thou coward,
&c.

it is as if she had concentrated the burning spirit of scorn, and dashed it in his face; every word seems to blister where it falls. In the scolding scene between her and queen Elinor, the laconic insolence of the latter is completely overborne by the torrent of bitter contumely which bursts from the lips of Constance, clothed in the most energetic, and often in the most figurative expressions.

ELINOR.

Who is it thou dost call usurper, France?

CONSTANCE.

Let me make answer; Thy usurping son.

ELINOR.

Out insolent! thy bastard shall be king,
That thou may'st be a queen, and check the world!

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CONSTANCE.

My bed was ever to thy son as true,
As thine was to thy husband; and this boy
Liker in feature to his father Geffrey,
Than thou and John in manners: being as like
As rain to water, or devil to his dam.
My boy a bastard! By my soul, I think
His father never was so true begot;
It cannot be, an if thou wert his mother.

ELINOR.

There's a good mother, boy, that blots thy father.

CONSTANCE.

There's a good grandam, boy, that would blot thee.

* * * * *

ELINOR.

Come to thy grandam, child.

CONSTANCE.

Do child; go to its grandam, child:
Give grandam kingdom, and its grandam will
Give it a plum, a cherry, and a fig:
There's a good grandam.

ARTHUR.

Good my mother, peace!
I would that I were low laid in my grave;
I am not worth this coil that's made for me.

ELINOR.

His mother shames him so, poor boy, he weeps.

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CONSTANCE.

Now shame upon you, whe'r she does or no!
His grandam's wrongs, and not his mother's shame,
Draw those heaven-moving pearls from his poor eyes,
Which heaven shall take in nature of a fee:
Ay, with these crystal beads heav'n shall be bribed
To do him justice, and revenge on you.

ELINOR.

Thou monstrous slanderer of heaven and earth!

CONSTANCE.

Thou monstrous injurer of heaven and earth!
Call me not slanderer; thou and thine usurp
The dominations, royalties, and rights
Of this oppressed boy. This is thy eldest son's son
Infortunate in nothing but in thee.

* * * * *

ELINOR.

Thou unadvised scold, I can produce
A will that bars the title of thy son.

CONSTANCE.

Ay, who doubts that? A will! a wicked will—
A woman's will—a canker'd grandam's will!

KING PHILIP.

Peace, lady: pause, or be more moderate.

And in a very opposite mood, when struggling with the consciousness of her

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own helpless situation, the same susceptible and excitable fancy still predominates:

> Thou shalt be punish'd for thus frighting me;
> For I am sick, and capable of fears;
> Oppressed with wrongs, and therefore full of fears;
> A widow, husbandless, subject to fears;
> A woman, naturally born to fears;
> And though thou now confess thou didst but jest
> With my vexed spirits, I cannot take a truce,
> But they will quake and tremble all this day.
> What dost thou mean by shaking of thy head?
> Why dost thou look so sadly on my son?
> What means that hand upon that breast of thine?
> Why holds thine eye that lamentable rheum,
> Like a proud river peering o'er his bounds?
> Be these sad signs confirmers of thy words?
> * * * * *
> Fellow, begone! I cannot brook thy sight—
> This news hath made thee a most ugly man!

It is the power of imagination which gives so peculiar a tinge to the maternal tenderness of Constance; she not only loves her son with the fond instinct of a mother's affection, but she loves him with her poetical imagination, exults in his beauty and his royal birth, hangs over him with idolatry,

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and sees his infant brow already encircled with the diadem. Her proud spirit, her ardent enthusiastic fancy, and her energetic self-will, all combine with her maternal love to give it that tone and character which belongs to her only: hence that most beautiful address to her son, which coming from the lips of Constance, is as full of nature and truth as of pathos and poetry, and which we could hardly sympathize with in any other:—

ARTHUR.

I do beseech you, madam, be content.

CONSTANCE.

If thou, that bid'st me be content, wert grim,
Ugly, and slanderous to thy mother's womb,
Full of unpleasing blots and sightless stains,
Lame, foolish, crooked, swart, prodigious,
Patched with foul moles and eye-offending marks,
I would not care—I then would be content;
For then I should not love thee; no, nor thou
Become thy great birth, nor deserve a crown.
But thou art fair, and at thy birth, dear boy!
Nature and Fortune join'd to make thee great:
Of Nature's gifts thou mayest with lilies boast,
And with the half-blown rose: but Fortune, O!

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She is corrupted, chang'd, and won from thee;
She adulterates hourly with thine uncle John;
And with her golden hand hath pluck'd on France
To tread down fair respect of sovereignty.

It is this exceeding vivacity of imagination which in the end turns sorrow to frenzy. Constance is not only a bereaved and doating mother, but a generous woman, betrayed by her own rash confidence; in whose mind the sense of injury mingling with the sense of grief, and her impetuous temper conflicting with her pride, combine to overset her reason; yet she is not mad: and how admirably, how forcibly she herself draws the distinction between the frantic violence of uncontrolled feeling and actual madness!—

Thou art not holy to belie me so;
I am not mad: this hair I tear is mine;
My name is Constance; I was Geffrey's wife;
Young Arthur is my son, and he is lost:
I am not mad; I would to Heaven I were!
For then, 't is like I should forget myself:
O, if I could, what grief should I forget!

Not only has Constance words at will,

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and fast as the passionate feelings rise in her mind they are poured forth with vivid, overpowering eloquence; but, like Juliet, she may be said to speak in pictures. For instance—

> Why holds thine eye that lamentable rheum?
> Like a proud river peering o'er its bounds.

And throughout the whole dialogue there is the same overflow of eloquence, the same splendour of diction, the same luxuriance of imagery; yet with an added grandeur, arising from habits of command, from the age, the rank, and the matronly character of Constance. Thus Juliet pours forth her love like a muse in a rapture: Constance raves in her sorrow like a Pythoness possessed with the spirit of pain. The love of Juliet is deep and infinite as the boundless sea: the grief of Constance is so great, that nothing but the round world itself is able to sustain it.

> I will instruct my sorrows to be proud;
> For grief is proud and makes his owner stout.
> To me, and to the state of my great grief

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Let kings assemble; for my grief 's so great,
That no supporter but the huge firm earth
Can hold it up. Here I and Sorrow sit;
Here is my throne,—bid kings come bow to it!

An image more majestic, more wonderfully sublime, was never presented to the fancy; yet almost equal as a flight of poetry is her apostrophe to the heavens:

Arm, arm, ye heavens, against these perjured kings,
A widow calls!—be husband to me, heavens!

And again—

O that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth,
Then with a passion would I shake the world!

Not only do her thoughts start into images, but her feelings become persons: grief haunts her as a living presence:

Grief fills the room up of my absent child;
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me;
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then have I reason to be fond of grief.

And death is welcomed as a bridegroom;

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she sees the visionary monster as Juliet *saw* "the bloody Tybalt festering in his shroud," and heaps one ghastly image upon another with all the wild luxuriance of a distempered fancy:

> O amiable, lovely death!
> Thou odoriferous stench! sound rottenness!
> Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,
> Thou hate and terror to prosperity,
> And I will kiss thy detestable bones;
> And put my eye-balls in thy vaulty brows;
> And ring these fingers with thy household worms;
> And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust;
> And be a carrion monster like thyself:
> Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smil'st,
> And buss thee as thy wife! Misery's love,
> O come to me!

Constance, who is a majestic being, is majestic in her very frenzy. Majesty is also the characteristic of Hermione: but what a difference between *her* silent, lofty, uncomplaining despair, and the eloquent grief of Constance, whose wild lamentations, which come bursting forth clothed in the grandest, the most poetical imagery, not only melt, but absolutely electrify us!

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On the whole, it may be said that pride and maternal affection form the basis of the character of Constance, as it is exhibited to us; but that these passions, in an equal degree common to many human beings, assume their peculiar and individual tinge from an extraordinary development of intellect and fancy. It is the energy of passion which lends the character its concentrated power, as it is the prevalence of imagination throughout which dilates it into magnificence.

Some of the most splendid poetry to be met with in Shakspeare, may be found in the parts of Juliet and Constance; the most splendid, perhaps, excepting only the parts of Lear and Othello; and for the same reason,—that Lear and Othello as men, and Juliet and Constance as women, are distinguished by the predominance of the same faculties—passion and imagination.

The sole deviation from history which may be considered as essentially interfering with the truth of the situation, is the entire omission of the character of Guy de

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Thouars, so that Constance is incorrectly represented as in a state of widowhood, at a period when, in point of fact, she was married. It may be observed that her marriage took place just at the period of the opening of the drama; that Guy de Thouars played no conspicuous part in the affairs of Bretagne till after the death of Constance, and that the mere presence of this personage, altogether superfluous in the action, would have completely destroyed the dramatic interest of the situation;—and what a situation! One more magnificent was never placed before the mind's eye than that of Constance, when, deserted and betrayed, she stands alone in her despair, amid her false friends and her ruthless enemies![1] The image of the mother-eagle, wounded and bleeding to death, yet stretched over her young in an attitude of defiance, while all the baser birds of prey are clamouring around her eyry, gives but a faint idea of the moral sublimity of this scene. Considered merely

[1] King John, act iii., scene 1.

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as a poetical or dramatic picture, the grouping is wonderfully fine; on one side, the vulture ambition of that mean-souled tyrant, John; on the other, the selfish, calculating policy of Philip: between them, balancing their passions in his hand, the cold, subtle, heartless Legate: the fiery, reckless Falconbridge; the princely Louis; the still unconquered spirit of that wrangling queen, old Elinor; the bridal loveliness and modesty of Blanche; the boyish grace and innocence of young Arthur; and Constance in the midst of them, in all the state of her great grief, a grand impersonation of pride and passion, helpless at once and desperate,—form an assemblage of figures, each perfect in its kind, and, taken all together, not surpassed for the variety, force, and splendour of the dramatic and picturesque effect.

Elinor of Guienne, and Blanche of Castile, who form part of the group around Constance, are sketches merely, but they are strictly historical portraits, and full of truth and spirit.

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At the period when Shakspeare has brought these three women on the scene together, Elinor of Guienne (the daughter of the last Duke of Guienne and Aquitaine, and like Constance, the heiress of a sovereign duchy), was near the close of her long, various, and unquiet life—she was nearly seventy: and, as in early youth, her violent passions had overborne both principle and policy, so in her old age we see the same character, only modified by time: her strong intellect and love of power, unbridled by conscience or principle, surviving when other passions were extinguished, and rendered more dangerous by a degree of subtlety and self-command to which her youth had been a stranger. Her personal and avowed hatred for Constance, together with its motives, are mentioned by the old historians. Holinshed expressly says, that Queen Elinor was mightily set against her grandson Arthur, rather moved thereto by envy conceived against his mother, than by any fault of the young prince, for that she knew and

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dreaded the high spirit of the Lady Constance.

Shakspeare has rendered this with equal spirit and fidelity.

QUEEN ELINOR.

What now, my son! have I not ever said,
How that ambitious Constance would not cease,
Till she had kindled France and all the world
Upon the right and party of her son?
This might have been prevented and made whole
With very easy arguments of love;
Which now the manage of two kingdoms must
With fearful bloody issue arbitrate.

KING JOHN.

Our strong possession and our right for us!

QUEEN ELINOR.

Your strong possession much more than your right;
Or else it must go wrong with you and me.
So much my conscience whispers in your ear—
Which none but Heaven, and you, and I, shall hear.

Queen Elinor preserved to the end of her life her influence over her children, and appears to have merited their respect. While entrusted with the government, during the absence of Richard I., she ruled with a steady hand, and made herself

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exceedingly popular; and as long as she lived to direct the counsels of her son John, his affairs prospered. For that intemperate jealousy which converted her into a domestic firebrand, there was at least much cause, though little excuse. Elinor had hated and wronged the husband of her youth,[1] and she had afterwards to endure the negligence and innumerable infidelities of the husband whom she passionately loved:[2]—"and so the whirlygig of time brought in his revenges." Elinor died in 1203, a few months after Constance, and before the murder of Arthur—a crime which, had she lived, would probably never have been consummated; for the nature of Elinor, though violent, had no tincture of the baseness and cruelty of her son.

[1] Louis VII. of France, whom she was accustomed to call, in contempt, *the monk*. Elinor's adventures in Syria, whither she accompanied Louis on the second Crusade, would form a romance.

[2] Henry II. of England. It is scarcely necessary to observe that the story of Fair Rosamond, as far as Elinor is concerned, is a mere invention of some ballad-maker of later times.

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Blanche of Castile was the daughter of Alphonso IX. of Castile, and the granddaughter of Elinor. At the time that she is introduced into the drama, she was about fifteen, and her marriage with Louis VIII., then Dauphin, took place in the abrupt manner here represented. It is not often that political marriages have the same happy result. We are told by the historians of that time, that from the moment Louis and Blanche met, they were inspired by a mutual passion, and that during a union of more than twenty-six years they were never known to differ, nor even spent more than a single day asunder.[1]

In her exceeding beauty and blameless reputation; her love for her husband, and strong domestic affections; her pride of birth and rank; her feminine gentleness of deportment; her firmness of temper; her religious bigotry; her love of absolute power and her upright and conscientious administration of it, Blanche greatly resembled Maria Theresa of Austria. She was,

[1] V. Mezerai.

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however, of a more cold and calculating nature; and in proportion as she was less amiable as a woman, did she rule more happily for herself and others. There cannot be a greater contrast than between the acute understanding, the steady temper, and the cool intriguing policy of Blanche, by which she succeeded in disuniting and defeating the powers arrayed against her and her infant son, and the rash confiding temper and susceptible imagination of Constance, which rendered herself and her son easy victims to the fraud or ambition of others. Blanche, during forty years, held in her hands the destinies of the greater part of Europe, and is one of the most celebrated names recorded in history—but in what does she survive to us except in a name? Nor history, nor fame, though "trumpet-tongued," could do for *her* what Shakspeare and poetry have done for Constance. The earthly reign of Blanche is over, her sceptre broken, and her power departed. When will the reign of Constance cease? when will *her* power depart?

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Not while this world is a world, and there exists in it human souls to kindle at the touch of genius, and human hearts to throb with human sympathies!

* * * *

There is no female character of any interest in the play of Richard II. The Queen (Isabelle of France) enacts the same passive part in the drama that she does in history.

The same remark applies to Henry IV. In this admirable play there is no female character of any importance; but Lady Percy, the wife of Hotspur, is a very lively and beautiful sketch: she is sprightly, feminine, and fond; but without anything energetic or profound, in mind or in feeling. Her gaiety and spirit in the first scenes, are the result of youth and happiness, and nothing can be more natural than the utter dejection and brokenness of heart which follow her husband's death: she is no heroine for war or tragedy; she has no thought of revenging her loss; and even her grief has something soft and quiet in

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its pathos. Her speech to her father-in-law, Northumberland, in which she entreats him "not to go to the wars," and at the same time pronounces the most beautiful eulogium on her heroic husband, is a perfect piece of feminine eloquence, both in the feeling and in the expression.

Almost every one knows by heart Lady Percy's celebrated address to her husband, beginning,

> O, my good lord, why are you thus alone?

and that of Portia to Brutus, in Julius Cæsar,

> . . . You've ungently, Brutus,
> Stol'n from my bed.

The situation is exactly similar, the topics of remonstrance are nearly the same; the sentiments and the style as opposite as are the characters of the two women. Lady Percy is evidently accustomed to win more from her fiery lord by caresses than by reason: he loves her in his rough way, "as Harry Percy's wife," but she has no real influence over him: he has no confidence in her.

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LADY PERCY.

. . . . In faith,
I'll know your business, Harry, that I will;
I fear my brother Mortimer doth stir
About his title, and hath sent for you
To line his enterprise, but if you go—

HOTSPUR.

So far afoot, I shall be weary, love!

The whole scene is admirable, but unnecessary here, because it illustrates no point of character in her. Lady Percy has no *character*, properly so called; whereas, that of Portia is very distinctly and faithfully drawn from the outline furnished by Plutarch. Lady Percy's fond upbraidings, and her half playful, half pouting entreaties, scarcely gain her husband's attention. Portia, with true matronly dignity and tenderness, pleads her right to share her husband's thoughts, and proves it too.

I grant I am a woman, but withal,
A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife:
I grant I am a woman, but withal,
A woman well reputed—Cato's daughter.

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Think you, I am no stronger than my sex,
Being so father'd and so husbanded?

* * * *

BRUTUS.

You are my true and honourable wife:
As dear to me, as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart!

Portia, as Shakspeare has truly felt and represented the character, is but a softened reflection of that of her husband Brutus: in him we see an excess of natural sensibility, an almost womanish tenderness of heart, repressed by the tenets of his austere philosophy: a stoic by profession, and in reality the reverse—acting deeds against his nature by the strong force of principle and will. In Portia there is the same profound and passionate feeling, and all her sex's softness and timidity, held in check by that self-discipline, that stately dignity, which she thought became a woman "so fathered and so husbanded." The fact of her inflicting on herself a voluntary wound to try her own fortitude, is perhaps the strongest proof of this disposition. Plu-

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tarch relates, that on the day on which Cæsar was assassinated, Portia appeared overcome with terror, and even swooned away, but did not in her emotion utter a word which could affect the conspirators. Shakspeare has rendered this circumstance literally.

PORTIA.

I pr'ythee, boy, run to the senate house,
Stay not to answer me, but get thee gone.
Why dost thou stay?

LUCIUS.

To know my errand, madam.

PORTIA.

I would have had thee there and here again,
Ere I can tell thee what thou should'st do there.
O constancy! be strong upon my side:
Set a huge mountain 'tween my heart and tongue!
I have a man's mind, but a woman's might.
. . . Ah me! how weak a thing
The heart of woman is! O I grow faint, &c.

There is another beautiful incident related by Plutarch, which could not well be dramatised. When Brutus and Portia parted for the last time in the island of Nisida, she restrained all expression of

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grief that she might not shake *his* fortitude; but, afterwards, in passing through a chamber in which there hung a picture of Hector and Andromache, she stopped, gazed upon it for a time with a settled sorrow, and at length burst into a passion of tears.[1]

If Portia had been a Christian, and lived in later times, she might have been another Lady Russel; but she made a poor stoic. No factitious or external control was sufficient to restrain such an exuberance of sensibility and fancy: and those who praise the *philosophy* of Portia and the *heroism* of her death, certainly mistook the character altogether. It is evident, from the manner of her death, that it was not deliberate self-destruction, "after the high Roman fashion," but took place in a paroxysm of

[1] When at Naples, I have often stood upon the rock at the extreme point of Posilippo, and looked down upon the little Island of Nisida, and thought of this scene till I forgot the Lazaretto which now deforms it: deforms it, however, to the fancy only, for the building itself, as it rises from amid the vines, the cypresses, and fig-trees which embosom it, looks beautiful at a distance.

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madness, caused by overwrought and suppressed feeling, grief, terror and suspense. Shakspeare has thus represented it:

BRUTUS.

O Cassius! I am sick of many griefs!

CASSIUS.

Of your philosophy you make no use,
If you give place to accidental evils.

BRUTUS.

No man bears sorrow better: Portia 's dead.

CASSIUS.

Ha!—Portia?

BRUTUS.

She is dead.

CASSIUS.

How 'scaped I killing when I cross'd you so?
O insupportable and touching loss—
Upon what sickness?

BRUTUS.

Impatient of my absence,
And grief that young Octavius with Mark Antony
Had made themselves so strong—(for with her death
These tidings came)—*with this she fell distract*,
And, her attendants absent, swallowed fire.

So much for woman's philosophy!

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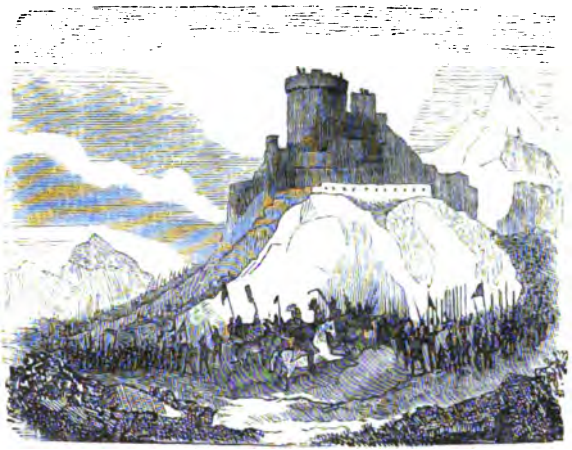

MARGARET OF ANJOU.

MALONE has written an essay, to prove from external and internal evidence, that the three parts of King Henry VI. were not originally written by Shakspeare, but altered by him from two old plays,[1] with considerable improvements and additions of his own. Burke, Porson, Dr. Warburton, and Dr. Farmer, pronounced this piece of criticism convincing and unanswerable;

[1] "The contention of the two Houses of York and Lancaster," in two parts, supposed by Malone to have been written about 1590.

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but Dr. Johnson and Steevens would not be convinced, and moreover, have contrived to answer the *unanswerable*. "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" The only arbiter in such a case is one's own individual taste and judgment. To me it appears that the three parts of Henry VI. have less of poetry and passion, and more of unnecessary verbosity and inflated language, than the rest of Shakspeare's works; that the continual exhibition of treachery, bloodshed, and violence, is revolting, and the want of unity of action, and of a pervading interest, oppressive and fatiguing; but also that there are splendid passages in the Second and Third Parts, such as Shakspeare alone could have written: and this is not denied by the most sceptical.[1]

[1] I abstain from making any remarks on the character of Joan of Arc, as delineated in the First part of Henry VI.; first, because I do not in my conscience attribute it to Shakspeare, and secondly, because in representing her according to the vulgar English traditions, as half sorceress, half enthusiast, and in the end, corrupted by pleasure and ambition, the truth of history, and the truth of nature, justice, and common sense, are equally violated. Schiller has

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Among the arguments against the authenticity of these plays, the character of Margaret of Anjou has not been adduced, and yet to those who have studied Shakspeare in his own spirit, it will appear the most conclusive of all. When we compare her with his other female characters, we are struck at once by the want of family likeness: Shakspeare was not always equal, but he had not two *manners*, as they say of painters. I discern his hand in particular

treated the character nobly; but in making Joan the slave of passion, and the victim of love, instead of the victim of patriotism, has committed, I think, a serious error in judgment and feeling; and I cannot sympathise with Madame de Staël's defence of him on this particular point. There was no occasion for this deviation from the truth of things, and from the dignity and spotless purity of the character. This young enthusiast, with her religious reveries, her simplicity, her heroism, her melancholy, her sensibility, her fortitude, her perfectly feminine bearing in all her exploits (for though she so often led the van of battle unshrinking, while death was all around her, she never struck a blow, nor stained her consecrated sword with blood—another point in which Schiller has wronged her), this heroine and martyr, over whose last moments we shed burning tears of pity and indignation, remains yet to be treated as a dramatic character, and I know but one person capable of doing this.

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parts, but I cannot recognise his spirit in the conception of the whole: he may have laid on some of the colours, but the original design has a certain hardness and heaviness, very unlike his usual style. Margaret of Anjou, as exhibited in these tragedies, is a dramatic portrait of considerable truth, and vigour, and consistency —but she is not one of Shakspeare's women. He who knew so well in what true greatness of spirit consisted—who could excite our respect and sympathy even for a Lady Macbeth, would never have given us a heroine without a touch of heroism; he would not have portrayed a high-hearted woman, struggling unsubdued against the strangest vicissitudes of fortune, meeting reverses and disasters, such as would have broken the most masculine spirit, with unshaken constancy, yet left her without a single personal quality which would excite our interest in her bravely-endured misfortunes; and this too in the very face of history. He would not have given us, in lieu of the magnanimous queen, the subtle and

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accomplished French woman, a mere "Amazonian trull," with every coarser feature of depravity and ferocity; he would have redeemed her from unmingled detestation; he would have breathed into her some of his own sweet spirit—he would have given the woman a soul.

The old chronicler Hall informs us, that Queen Margaret "excelled all other as well in beauty and favour, as in wit and policy, and was in stomach and courage more like to a man than to a woman." He adds, that after the espousals of Henry and Margaret, "the king's friends fell from him; the lords of the realm fell in division among themselves; the Commons rebelled against their natural prince; fields were foughten; many thousands slain; and, finally, the king was deposed, and his son slain, and his queen sent home again with as much misery and sorrow, as she was received with pomp and triumph."

This passage seems to have furnished the groundwork of the character as it is developed in these plays with no great

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depth or skill. Margaret is portrayed with all the exterior graces of her sex; as bold and artful, with spirit to dare, resolution to act, and fortitude to endure; but treacherous, haughty, dissembling, vindictive, and fierce. The bloody struggle for power, in which she was engaged, and the companionship of the ruthless iron men around her, seem to have left her nothing of womanhood but the heart of a mother — that last stronghold of our feminine nature! So far the character is consistently drawn: it has something of the power, but none of the flowing ease of Shakspeare's manner. There are fine materials not well applied; there is poetry in some of the scenes and speeches; the situations are often exceedingly poetical; but in the character of Margaret herself, there is not an atom of poetry. In her artificial dignity, her plausible wit, and her endless volubility, she would remind us of some of the most admired heroines of French tragedy, but for that unlucky box on the ear which she gives the Duchess of Gloster,—a viola-

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tion of tragic decorum, which of course destroys all parallel.

Having said thus much, I shall point out some of the finest and most characteristic scenes in which Margaret appears. The speech in which she expresses her scorn of her meek husband, and her impatience of the power exercised by those fierce overbearing barons, York, Salisbury, Warwick, Buckingham, is very fine, and conveys as faithful an idea of those feudal times as of the woman who speaks. The burst of female spite with which she concludes, is admirable—

Not all these lords do vex me half so much
As that proud dame, the Lord Protector's wife.
She sweeps it through the court with troops of ladies,
More like an empress than Duke Humphrey's wife,
Strangers in court do take her for the queen:
She bears a duke's revenues on her back,
And in her heart she scorns our poverty.
Shall I not live to be avenged on her?
Contemptuous base-born callet as she is!
She vaunted 'mongst her minions t'other day,
The very train of her worst wearing gown
Was better worth than all my father's lands,
Till Suffolk gave two dukedoms for his daughter.

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Her intriguing spirit, the facility with which she enters into the murderous confederacy against the good Duke Humphrey, the artful plausibility with which she endeavours to turn suspicion from herself—confounding her gentle consort by mere dint of words — are exceedingly characteristic, but not the less revolting.

Her criminal love for Suffolk, (which is a dramatic incident, not an historic fact) gives rise to the beautiful parting scene in the third act; a scene which it is impossible to read without a thrill of emotion, hurried away by that power and pathos which forces us to sympathise with the eloquence of grief, yet excites not a momentary interest either for Margaret or her lover. The ungoverned fury of Margaret in the first instance, the manner in which she calls on Suffolk to curse his enemies, and then shrinks back overcome by the violence of the spirit she had herself evoked, and terrified by the vehemence of his imprecations; the transition in her mind from the extremity of rage to tears and melting fondness,

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have been pronounced, and justly, to be in Shakspeare's own manner.

> Go, speak not to me—even now begone.
> O go not yet! Even thus two friends condemn'd
> Embrace, and kiss, and take ten thousand leaves.
> Loather a hundred times to part than die:
> Yet now farewell; and farewell life with thee!

which is followed by that beautiful and intense burst of passion from Suffolk—

> 'Tis not the hand I care for, wert thou hence;
> A wilderness is populous enough,
> So Suffolk had thy heavenly company:
> For where thou art, there is the world itself,
> With every several pleasure in the world;
> And where thou art not, desolation!

In the third part of Henry the Sixth, Margaret, engaged in the terrible struggle for her husband's throne, appears to rather more advantage. The indignation against Henry, who had pitifully yielded his son's birthright for the privilege of reigning unmolested during his own life, is worthy of her, and gives rise to a beautiful speech. We are here inclined to sympathise with her; but soon after follows the murder of

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the Duke of York; and the base revengeful spirit and atrocious cruelty with which she insults over him, unarmed and a prisoner, —the bitterness of her mockery, and the unwomanly malignity with which she presents him with a napkin stained with the blood of his youngest son, and "bids the father wipe his eyes withal," turn all our sympathy into aversion and horror. York replies in the celebrated speech, beginning—

> She-wolf of France, and worse than wolves of France,
> Whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth—

and taunts her with the poverty of her father, the most irritating topic he could have chosen.

> Hath that poor monarch taught thee to insult?
> It needs not, nor it boots thee not, proud queen,
> Unless the adage must be verified,
> That beggars, mounted, ride their horse to death.
> 'Tis beauty, that doth oft make women proud;
> But, God he knows, thy share thereof is small.
> 'Tis virtue that doth make them most admired;
> The contrary doth make thee wondered at.
> 'Tis government that makes them seem divine,
> The want thereof makes thee abominable.
>
> * * * * *

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O tiger's heart, wrapt in a woman's hide!
How could'st thou drain the life-blood of the child
To bid the father wipe his face withal,
And yet be seen to bear a woman's face?
Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible,
Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless!

By such a woman as Margaret is here depicted, such a speech could be answered only in one way—with her dagger's point—and thus she answers it.

It is some comfort to reflect that this trait of ferocity is not historical; the body of the Duke of York was found, after the battle, among the heaps of slain, and his head struck off: but even this was not done by the command of Margaret.

In another passage, the truth and consistency of the character of Margaret are sacrificed to the march of the dramatic action, with a very ill effect. When her fortunes were at the very lowest ebb, and she had sought refuge in the court of the French King, Warwick, her most formidable enemy, upon some disgust he had taken against Edward the Fourth, offered

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to espouse her cause; and proposed a match between the prince her son and his daughter Anne of Warwick—the "gentle Lady Anne," who figures in Richard the Third. In the play, Margaret embraces the offer without a moment's hesitation:[1] we are disgusted by her versatile policy, and a meanness of spirit in no way allied to the magnanimous forgiveness of her terrible adversary. The Margaret of history sternly resisted this degrading expedient. She could not, she said, pardon from her heart, the man who had been the primary cause of all her misfortunes. She mistrusted Warwick, despised him for the motives of his revolt from Edward, and considered that to match her son into the family of her enemy from mere policy, was a species of degradation. It took Louis the Eleventh, with all his art and eloquence, fifteen days to wring

[1] See Henry VI. Part III., Act iii., sc. 3—

QUEEN MARGARET.

Warwick, these words have turned my hate to love:
And I forgive and quite forget old faults,
And joy, that thou becom'st King Henry's friend.

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a reluctant consent, accompanied with tears, from this high-hearted woman.

The speech of Margaret to her council of generals before the battle of Tewkesbury (Act v., scene 5), is as remarkable a specimen of false rhetoric, as her address to the soldiers on the eve of the fight, is of true and passionate eloquence.

She witnesses the final defeat of her army, the massacre of her adherents, and the murder of her son; and though the savage Richard would willingly have put an end to her misery, and exclaims very pertinently—

> Why should she live to fill the world with words?

she is dragged forth unharmed, a woful spectacle of extremest wretchedness, to which death would have been an undeserved relief. If we compare the clamorous and loud exclaims of Margaret after the slaughter of her son, to the ravings of Constance, we shall perceive where Shakspeare's genius did *not* preside, and where it *did*. Margaret, in bold defiance of history, but with fine dramatic effect, is introduced again in the

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gorgeous and polluted court of Edward the Fourth. There she stalks around the seat of her former greatness, like a terrible phantom of departed majesty, uncrowned, unsceptred, desolate, powerless—or like a vampire thirsting for blood—or like a grim prophetess of evil, imprecating that ruin on the head of her enemies, which she lived to see realized. The scene following the murder of the princes in the Tower, in which Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York sit down on the ground bewailing their desolation, and Margaret suddenly appears from behind them, like the very personification of woe, and seats herself beside them revelling in their despair, is, in the general conception and effect, grand and appalling.

THE DUCHESS.

O, Harry's wife, triumph not in my woes;
God witness with me, I have wept for thine!

QUEEN MARGARET.

Bear with me, I am hungry for revenge,
And now I cloy me with beholding it.
Thy Edward he is dead, that kill'd my Edward;
Thy other Edward dead, to quit my Edward:

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Young York he is but boot, because both they
Match not the high perfection of my loss.
Thy Clarence he is dead, that stabb'd my Edward;
And the beholders of this tragic play,
The adulterate Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey,
Untimely smother'd in their dusky graves.
Richard yet lives, hell's black intelligencer,
Only reserved their factor, to buy souls
And send them thither. But at hand, at hand,
Ensues his piteous and unpitied end;
Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar for him; saints pray
To have him suddenly convey'd from hence.
Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I pray,
That I may live to say, The dog is dead.[1]

She should have stopped here; but the effect thus powerfully excited is marred and weakened by so much superfluous rhetoric, that we are tempted to exclaim with the old Duchess of York—

Why should calamity be full of words?

[1] Horace Walpole observes, that "it is evident from the conduct of Shakspeare, that the house of Tudor retained all their Lancasterian prejudices even in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. In his play of Richard the Third, he seems to deduce the woes of the house of York from the curses which Queen Margaret had vented against them; and he could not give that weight to her curses, without supposing a right in her to utter them."

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QUEEN KATHERINE OF ARRAGON.

To have a just idea of the accuracy and beauty of this historical portrait, we ought to bring immediately before us those circumstances of Katherine's life and times, and those parts of her character, which belong to a period previous to the opening of the play. We shall then be better able to appreciate the skill with which Shakspeare has applied the materials before him.

Katherine of Arragon, the fourth and youngest daughter of Ferdinand king of Arragon, and Isabella of Castile, was born at Alcala, whither her mother had retired to winter after one of the most terrible campaigns of the Moorish war—that of 1485.

Katherine had derived from nature no dazzling qualities of mind, and no striking

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advantages of person. She inherited a tincture of Queen Isabella's haughtiness and obstinacy of temper, but neither her beauty nor her splendid talents. Her education under the direction of that extraordinary mother, had implanted in her mind the most austere principles of virtue, the highest ideas of female decorum, the most narrow and bigoted attachment to the forms of religion, and that excessive pride of birth and rank, which distinguished so particularly her family and her nation. In other respects, her understanding was strong, and her judgment clear. The natural turn of her mind was simple, serious, and domestic, and all the impulses of her heart kindly and benevolent. Such was Katherine; such, at least, she appears on a reference to the chronicles of her times, and particularly from her own letters, and the papers written or dictated by herself which relate to her divorce; all of which are distinguished by the same artless simplicity of style, the same quiet good sense, the same resolute, yet gentle spirit and fervent piety.

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When five years old, Katherine was solemnly affianced to Arthur, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of Henry VII.; and in the year 1501, she landed in England, after narrowly escaping shipwreck on the southern coast, from which every adverse wind conspired to drive her. She was received in London with great honour, and immediately on her arrival united to the young Prince. He was then fifteen, and Katherine in her seventeenth year.

Arthur, as it is well known, survived his marriage only five months; and the reluctance of Henry VII. to refund the splendid dowry of the Infanta, and forego the advantages of an alliance with the most powerful prince of Europe, suggested the idea of uniting Katherine to his second son Henry; after some hesitation, a dispensation was procured from the Pope, and she was betrothed to Henry in her eighteenth year. The prince, who was then only twelve years old, resisted as far as he was able to do so, and appears to have really felt a degree of horror at the idea of marrying his brother's widow.

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Nor was the mind of King Henry at rest: as his health declined, his conscience reproached him with the equivocal nature of the union into which he had forced his son; and the vile motives of avarice and expediency which had governed him on this occasion. A short time previous to his death, he dissolved the engagement, and even caused Henry to sign a paper in which he solemnly renounced all idea of a future union with the Infanta. It is observable, that Henry signed this paper with reluctance, and that Katherine, instead of being sent back to her own country, still remained in England.

It appears that Henry, who was now about seventeen, had become interested for Katherine, who was gentle and amiable. The difference of years was rather a circumstance in her favour; for Henry was just at that age when a youth is most likely to be captivated by a woman older than himself; and no sooner was he required to renounce her, than the interest she had gradually gained in his affections, became, by opposition, a strong passion. Immediately after his fa-

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ther's death, he declared his resolution to take for his wife the Lady Katherine of Spain, and none other; and when the matter was discussed in council, it was urged that, besides the many advantages of the match in a political point of view, she had given so "much proof of virtue, and sweetness of condition, as they knew not where to parallel her." About six weeks after his accession, June 3, 1509, the marriage was celebrated with truly royal splendour, Henry being then eighteen, and Katherine in her twenty-fourth year.

It has been said with truth, that if Henry had died while Katherine was yet his wife, and Wolsey his minister, he would have left behind him the character of a magnificent, popular, and accomplished prince, instead of that of the most hateful ruffian and tyrant who ever swayed these realms. Notwithstanding his occasional infidelities, and his impatience at her midnight vigils, her long prayers, and her religious austerities, Katherine and Henry lived in harmony together. He was fond of openly displaying his res-

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pect and love for her; and she exercised a strong and salutary influence over his turbulent and despotic spirit. When Henry set out on his expedition to France, in 1513, he left Katherine Regent of the kingdom during his absence, with full powers to carry on the war against the Scots; and the Earl of Surry at the head of the army, as her lieutenant-general. It is curious to find Katherine—the pacific, domestic, and unpretending Katherine—describing herself as having "her heart set to war," and "horrible busy" with making "standards, banners, badges, scarfs, and the like."[1] Nor was this mere silken preparation—mere dalliance with the pomp and circumstance of war; for within a few weeks afterwards, her general defeated the Scots in the famous battle of Flodden-field, where James IV. and most of his nobility were slain.[2]

[1] See her letters in Ellis's Collection.

[2] Under similar circumstances, one of Katherine's predecessors, Philippa of Hainault, had gained in her husband's absence the battle of Neville Cross, in which David Bruce was taken prisoner.

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Katherine's letter to Henry, announcing this event, so strikingly displays the piety and tenderness, the quiet simplicity, and real magnanimity of her character, that there cannot be a more apt and beautiful illustration of the exquisite truth and keeping of Shakspeare's portrait.

SIR,

My Lord Howard hath sent me a letter, open to your Grace, within one of mine, by the which ye shall see at length the great victory that our Lord hath sent your subjects in your absence: and for this cause, it is no need herein to trouble your Grace with long writing; but to my thinking, this battle hath been to your Grace, and all your realm, the greatest honour that could be, and more than ye should win all the crown of France, thanked be God for it! And I am sure your Grace forgetteth not to do this, which shall be cause to send you many more such great victories, as I trust he shall do. My husband, for haste, with Rougecross, I could not send your

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Grace the piece of the king of Scots' coat, which John Glyn now bringeth. In this your Grace shall see how I can keep my promise, sending you for your banners a king's coat. I thought to send himself unto you, but our Englishmen's hearts would not suffer it. It should have been better for him to have been in peace than have this reward, but all that God sendeth is for the best. My Lord of Surry, my Henry, would fain know your pleasure in the burying of the king of Scots' body, for he hath written to me so. With the next messenger, your Grace's pleasure may be herein known. And with this I make an end, praying God to send you home shortly; for without this, no joy here can be accomplished—and for the same I pray. And now go to our Lady at Walsyngham, that I promised so long ago to see.

At Woburn, the 16th day of September (1513).

I send your Grace herein a bill, found in a Scottishman's purse, of such things as the French king sent to the said king of

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Scots, to make war against you, beseeching you to send Mathew hither, as soon as this messenger cometh with tidings of your Grace.

Your humble wife and true servant,
KATHERINE.[1]

The legality of the king's marriage with Katherine remained undisputed till 1527. In the course of that year, Anna Bullen first appeared at court, and was appointed maid of honour to the queen; and then, and not till then, did Henry's union with his brother's wife "creep too near his conscience." In the following year, he sent special messengers to Rome, with secret instructions: they were required to discover (among other "hard questions") whether, if the queen entered a religious life, the king might have the Pope's dispensation to marry again; and whether, if the king (for the better inducing the queen

[1] Ellis's Collection. We must keep in mind that Katherine was a foreigner, and till after she was seventeen, never spoke or wrote a word of English.

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thereto) would enter himself into a religious life, the Pope would dispense with the king's vow, and leave her there?

Poor Katherine! we are not surprised to read, that when she understood what was intended against her, "she laboured with all those passions which jealousy of the king's affection, sense of her own honour, and the legitimation of her daughter, could produce, laying in conclusion the whole fault on the Cardinal." It is elsewhere said, that Wolsey bore the queen ill-will, in consequence of her reflecting with some severity on his haughty temper, and very unclerical life.

The proceedings were pending for nearly six years, and one of the causes of this long delay, in spite of Henry's impatient and despotic character, is worth noting. The old Chronicle tells us, that though the men generally, and more particularly the priests and the nobles, sided with Henry in this matter, yet all the ladies of England were against it. They justly felt that the honour and welfare of no woman was

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secure if, after twenty years of union, she might be thus deprived of all her rights as a wife; the clamour became so loud and general, that the king was obliged to yield to it for a time, to stop the proceedings, and to banish Anna Bullen from the court.

Cardinal Campeggio, called by Shakspeare Campeius, arrived in England in October, 1528. He at first endeavoured to persuade Katherine to avoid the disgrace and danger of contesting her marriage, by entering a religious house; but she rejected his advice with strong expressions of disdain. "I am," said she, "the king's true wife, and to him married; and if all doctors were dead, or law or learning far out of men's minds at the time of our marriage, yet I cannot think that the court of Rome, and the whole church of England, would have consented to a thing unlawful and detestable as you call it. Still I say I am his wife, and for him will I pray."

About two years afterwards, Wolsey died (in November, 1530):—the king and queen met for the last time, on the 14th of

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July, 1531. Until that period, some outward show of respect and kindness had been maintained between them; but the king then ordered her to repair to a private residence, and no longer to consider herself as his lawful wife. "To which the virtuous and mourning queen replied no more than this, that to whatever place she removed, nothing could remove her from being the king's wife. And so they bid each other farewell; and from this time the king never saw her more." [1] He married Anna Bullen in 1532, while the decision relating to his former marriage was still pending. The sentence of divorce to which Katherine never would submit, was finally pronounced by Cranmer in 1533; and the unhappy queen, whose health had been gradually declining through these troubles of heart, died January 29, 1536, in the fiftieth year of her age.

Thus the action of the play of Henry VIII. includes events which occurred from the

[1] Hall's Chronicle.

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impeachment of the Duke of Buckingham in 1521, to the death of Katherine in 1536. In making the death of Katherine precede the birth of Elizabeth, Shakspeare has committed an anachronism, not only pardonable, but necessary. We must remember that the construction of the play required a happy termination; and that the birth of Elizabeth, before or after the death of Katherine, involved the question of her legitimacy. By this slight deviation from the real course of events, Shakspeare has not perverted historic facts, but merely sacrificed them to a higher principle; and in doing so has not only preserved dramatic propriety, and heightened the poetical interest, but has given a strong proof both of his delicacy and his judgment.

If we also call to mind, that in this play Katherine is properly the heroine, and exhibited from first to last as the very "queen of earthly queens;" that the whole interest is thrown round her and Wolsey—the one the injured rival, the other the enemy of Anna Bullen—and that it was

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written in the reign and for the court of Elizabeth, we shall yet farther appreciate the moral greatness of the poet's mind, which disdained to sacrifice justice and the truth of nature to any time-serving expediency.

Schlegel observes somewhere, that in the literal accuracy and apparent artlessness with which Shakspeare has adapted some of the events and characters of history to his dramatic purposes, he has shown equally his genius and his wisdom. This, like most of Schlegel's remarks, is profound and true; and in this respect Katherine of Arragon may rank as the triumph of Shakspeare's genius and his wisdom. There is nothing in the whole range of poetical fiction in any respect resembling or approaching her; there is nothing comparable, I suppose, but Katherine's own portrait by Holbein, which, equally true to the life, is yet as far inferior as Katherine's person was inferior to her mind. Not only has Shakspeare given us here a delineation as faithful as it is beautiful, of a peculiar

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modification of character; but he has bequeathed us a precious moral lesson in this proof that virtue alone,—(by which I mean here the union of truth or conscience with benevolent affection—the one the highest law, the other the purest impulse of the soul,) — that such virtue is a sufficient source of the deepest pathos and power without any mixture of foreign or external ornament: for who but Shakspeare would have brought before us a queen and a heroine of tragedy, stripped her of all pomp of place and circumstance, dispensed with all the usual sources of poetical interest, as youth, beauty, grace, fancy, commanding intellect; and without any appeal to our imagination, without any violation of historical truth, or any sacrifices of the other dramatic personages for the sake of effect, could depend on the moral principle alone, to touch the very springs of feeling in our bosoms, and melt and elevate our hearts through the purest and holiest impulses of our nature!

The character, when analysed, is, in the

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first place, distinguished by *truth*. I do not only mean its truth to nature, or its relative truth arising from its historic fidelity and dramatic consistency, but *truth* as a quality of the soul; this is the basis of the character. We often hear it remarked, that those who are themselves perfectly true and artless, are in this world the more easily and frequently deceived—a commonplace fallacy: for we shall ever find that truth is as undeceived as it is undeceiving, and that those who are true to themselves and others, may now and then be mistaken, or in particular instances duped by the intervention of some other affection or quality of the mind; but they are generally free from illusion, and they are seldom imposed upon in the long run by the shows of things and superfices of characters. It is by this integrity of heart and clearness of understanding, this light of truth within her own soul, and not through any acuteness of intellect, that Katherine detects and exposes the real character of Wolsey, though unable either to unravel his designs or defeat them.

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> . . . My lord, my lord,
> I am a simple woman, much too weak
> T' oppose your cunning.

She rather intuitively feels than knows his duplicity, and in the dignity of her simplicity she towers above his arrogance as much as she scorns his crooked policy. With this essential truth are combined many other qualities, natural or acquired, all made out with the same uncompromising breath of execution and fidelity of pencil, united with the utmost delicacy of feeling. For instance, the apparent contradiction arising from the contrast between Katherine's natural disposition and the situation in which she is placed; her lofty Castilian pride and her extreme simplicity of language and deportment; the inflexible resolution with which she asserts her right, and her soft resignation to unkindness and wrong; her warmth of temper breaking through the meekness of a spirit subdued by a deep sense of religion; and a degree of austerity tinging her real benevolence; —all these qualities, opposed yet harmo-

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nising, has Shakspeare placed before us in a few admirable scenes.

Katherine is at first introduced as pleading before the king in behalf of the commonalty, who had been driven by the extortions of Wolsey into some illegal excesses. In this scene, which is true to history, we have her upright reasoning mind, her steadiness of purpose, her piety and benevolence, placed in a strong light. The unshrinking dignity with which she opposes without descending to brave the Cardinal, the stern rebuke addressed to the Duke of Buckingham's surveyor, are finely characteristic; and by thus exhibiting Katherine as invested with all her conjugal rights and influence, and royal state, the subsequent situations are rendered more impressive. She is placed in the first instance on such a height in our esteem and reverence, that in the midst of her abandonment and degradation, and the profound pity she afterwards inspires, the first effect remains unimpaired, and she never falls beneath it.

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In the beginning of the second act, we are prepared for the proceedings of the divorce, and our respect for Katherine heightened by the general sympathy for "the good queen," as she is expressively entitled, and by the following beautiful eulogium on her character uttered by the Duke of Norfolk:

> He (Wolsey) counsels a divorce—the loss of her
> That like a jewel hath hung twenty years
> About his neck, yet never lost her lustre.
> Of her that loves him with that excellence
> That angels love good men with. Even of her,
> That when the greatest stroke of fortune falls,
> Will bless the King!

The scene in which Anna Bullen is introduced as expressing her grief and sympathy for her royal mistress is exquisitely graceful.

> Here 's the pang that pinches:
> His highness having liv'd so long with her, and she
> So good a lady, that no tongue could ever
> Pronounce dishonour of her,—by my life
> She never knew harm doing. O now, after
> So many courses of the sun enthron'd,

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Still growing in a majesty and pomp,—the which
To leave is a thousandfold more bitter, than
'T is sweet at first to acquire. After this process,
To give her the avaunt! it is a pity
Would move a monster.

OLD LADY.

Hearts of most hard temper
Melt and lament for her.

ANNE.

O, God's will! much better
She ne'er had known pomp: though it be temporal,
Yet if that quarrel, fortune, do divorce
It from the bearer, 't is a sufferance, panging
As soul and body's severing.

OLD LADY.

Alas, poor lady!
She 's a stranger now again.

ANNE.

So much the more
Must pity drop upon her. Verily,
I swear 't is better to be lowly born,
And range with humble livers in content,
Than to be perk'd up in a glistering grief,
And wear a golden sorrow.

How completely, in the few passages appropriated to Anna Bullen, is her character

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portrayed! with what a delicate and yet luxuriant grace is she sketched off, with her gaiety and her beauty, her levity, her extreme mobility, her sweetness of disposition, her tenderness of heart, and, in short, all her *femalities!* How nobly has Shakspeare done justice to the two women, and heightened our interest in both, by placing the praises of Katherine in the mouth of Anna Bullen! and how characteristic of the latter, that she should first express unbounded pity for her mistress, insisting chiefly on her fall from her regal state and worldly pomp, thus betraying her own disposition—

> For she that had all the fair parts of woman,
> Had, too, a woman's heart, which ever yet
> Affected eminence, wealth, and sovereignty.

That she should call the loss of temporal pomp, once enjoyed, "a sufferance equal to soul and body's severing;" that she should immediately protest that she would not herself be a queen—"No, good troth! not for all the riches under heaven!"—and not

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long afterwards ascend without reluctance that throne and bed from which her royal mistress had been so cruelly divorced!—how natural! The portrait is not less true and masterly than that of Katherine; but the character is overborne by the superior moral firmness and intrinsic excellence of the latter. That we may be more fully sensible of this contrast, the beautiful scene just alluded to immediately precedes Katherine's trial at Blackfriars, and the description of Anna Bullen's triumphant beauty at her coronation, is placed immediately before the dying scene of Katherine; yet with equal good taste and good feeling Shakspeare has constantly avoided all personal collision between the two characters; nor does Anna Bullen ever appear as queen except in the pageant of the procession, which in reading the play is scarcely noticed.

To return to Katherine. The whole of the trial scene is given nearly verbatim from the old chronicles and records; but the dryness and harshness of the law pro-

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ceedings is tempered at once and elevated by the genius and the wisdom of the poet. It appears, on referring to the historical authorities, that when the affair was first agitated in council, Katherine replied to the long expositions and theological sophistries of her opponents with resolute simplicity and composure:—"I am a woman, and lack wit and learning to answer these opinions; but I am sure that neither the king's father nor my father would have condescended to our marriage, if it had been judged unlawful. As to your saying that I should put the cause to eight persons of this realm, for quietness of the king's conscience, I pray Heaven to send his Grace a quiet conscience: and this shall be your answer, that I say I am his lawful wife, and to him lawfully married, though not worthy of it; and in this point I will abide, till the court of Rome, which was privy to the beginning, have made a final ending of it."[1]

Katherine's appearance in the court at Blackfriars, attended by a noble troop of

[1] Hall's Chronicle, p. 781.

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ladies and prelates of her counsel, and her refusal to answer the citation, are historical.[1] Her speech to the king—

> Sir, I beseech you do me right and justice,
> And to bestow your pity on me, &c., &c.

is taken word for word (as nearly as the change from prose to blank verse would allow) from the old record in Hall. It would have been easy for Shakspeare to have exalted his own skill, by throwing a colouring of poetry and eloquence into this speech, without altering the sense or sentiment; but by adhering to the calm argumentative simplicity of manner and diction natural to the woman, he has preserved the truth of character without lessening the

[1] The court at Blackfriars sat on the 28th of May, 1529. "The queen being called, accompanied by the four bishops and others of her counsel, and a great company of ladies and gentlewomen following her; and after her obeisance, sadly and with great gravity, she appealed from them to the court of Rome."—*See Hall and Cavendish's Life of Wolsey.*

The account which Hume gives of this scene is very elegant; but after the affecting *naiveté* of the old chroniclers, it is very cold and unsatisfactory.

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pathos of the situation. Her challenging Wolsey as a "foe to truth," and her very expressions, "I utterly refuse—yea, from my soul *abhor* you for my judge," are taken from fact. The sudden burst of indignant passion towards the close of this scene,

> In one who ever yet
> Had stood to charity, and displayed the effects
> Of disposition gentle, and of wisdom
> O'ertopping woman's power;

is taken from nature, though it occurred on a different occasion.[1]

Lastly, the circumstance of her being called back after she had appealed from the court, and angrily refusing to return, is from the life. Master Griffith, on whose arm she leaned, observed that she was called: "On, on," quoth she; "it maketh no matter, for it is no indifferent court for me, therefore I will not tarry. Go on your ways."[2]

[1] "The queen answered the Duke of Suffolk very highly and obstinately, with many high words; and suddenly, in a fury, she departed from him into her privy chamber."—*Vide Hall's Chronicle.*

[2] Vide Cavendish's Life of Wolsey.

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King Henry's own assertion, "I dare to say, my lords, that for her womanhood, wisdom, nobility, and gentleness, never prince had such another wife, and therefore if I would willingly change her I were not wise," is thus beautifully paraphrased by Shakspeare:

> That man i' the world who shall report he has
> A better wife, let him in nought be trusted,
> For speaking false in that! Thou art alone,
> If thy rare qualities, sweet gentleness
> (Thy meekness, saint-like, wife-like government,
> Obeying in commanding; and thy parts,
> Sovereign and pious else, could speak thee out),
> The queen of earthly queens. She 's nobly born,
> And like her true nobility she has
> Carried herself towards me.

The annotators on Shakspeare have all observed the close resemblance between this fine passage—

> Sir,
> I am about to weep, but thinking that
> We are a queen, or long have dreamed so, certain
> The daughter of a king—my drops of tears
> I 'll turn to sparks of fire.

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and the speech of Hermione—

> I am not prone to weeping as our sex
> Commonly are, the want of which vain dew
> Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have
> That honourable grief lodged here, which burns
> Worse than tears drown.

But these verbal gentlemen do not seem to have felt that the resemblance is merely on the surface, and that the two passages could not possibly change places, without a manifest violation of the truth of character. In Hermione it is pride of sex merely: in Katherine it is pride of place and pride of birth. Hermione, though so superbly majestic, is perfectly independent of her regal state: Katherine, though so meekly pious, will neither forget hers, nor allow it to be forgotten by others for a moment. Hermione, when deprived of that "crown and comfort of her life," her husband's love, regards all things else with despair and indifference except her feminine honour: Katherine, divorced and abandoned, still with true Spanish pride stands upon respect,

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and will not bate one atom of her accustomed state.

> Though unqueened, yet like a queen,
> And daughter to a king, inter me!

The passage—

> A fellow of the royal bed, that owns
> A moiety of the throne—a great king's daughter,
> . . . . . here standing
> To prate and talk for life and honour 'fore
> Who please to come to hear,[1]

would apply nearly to both queens, yet a single sentiment—nay, a single sentence—could not possibly be transferred from one character to the other. The magnanimity, the noble simplicity, the purity of heart, the resignation in each—how perfectly equal in degree! how diametrically opposite in kind![2]

[1] Winter's Tale, act iii., scene 2.

[2] I have constantly abstained from considering any of these characters with a reference to the theatre; yet I cannot help remarking, that if Mrs. Siddons, who excelled equally in Hermione and Katherine, and threw such majesty of demeanor, such power, such picturesque effect, in both,

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Once more to return to Katherine.

We are told by Cavendish, that when Wolsey and Campeggio visited the queen by the king's order she was found at work among her women, and came forth to meet the cardinals with a skein of white thread hanging about her neck; that when Wolsey addressed her in Latin, she interrupted him, saying, "Nay, good my lord, speak to me in English, I beseech you; although I understand Latin." "Forsooth then," quoth my lord, "madam, if it please your grace, we come both to know your mind, how ye be disposed to do in this matter between the king and you, and also to declare secretly our opinions and our counsel unto you, which we have intended of very zeal and obedience that we bear to your grace." "My lords, I thank you

could likewise feel and convey the infinite contrast between the ideal grace, the classical repose and imaginative charm thrown round Hermione, and the matter-of-fact, artless, prosaic nature of Katherine; between the poetical grandeur of the former, and the moral dignity of the latter,—then she certainly exceeded all that I could have imagined possible, even to *her* wonderful powers.

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then," quoth she, "of your good wills; but to make answer to your request I cannot so suddenly, for I was set among my maidens at work, thinking full little of any such matter; wherein there needeth a longer deliberation, and a better head than mine to make answer to so noble wise men as ye be. I had need of good counsel in this case, which toucheth me so near; and for any counsel or friendship that I can find in England, they are nothing to my purpose or profit. Think you, I pray you, my lords, will any Englishmen counsel, or be friendly unto me, against the king's pleasure, they being his subjects? Nay, forsooth, my lords! and for my counsel, in whom I do intend to put my trust, they be not here; they be in Spain, in my native country.[1] Alas! my lords, I am a poor

[1] This affecting passage is thus rendered by Shakspeare:

> Nay, forsooth, my friends,
> They that must weigh out my afflictions—
> They that my trust must grow to, live not here—
> They are, as all my other comforts, far hence,
> In mine own country, lords.
>
> *Henry* VIII., *act* iii., *scene* 1.

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woman lacking both wit and understanding sufficiently to answer such approved wise men as ye be both, in so weighty a matter. I pray you to extend your good and indifferent minds in your authority unto me, for I am a simple woman, destitute and barren of friendship and counsel, here in a foreign region; and as for your counsel, I will not refuse, but be glad to hear."

It appears, also, that when the Archbishop of York and Bishop Tunstall waited on her at her house near Huntingdon, with the sentence of the divorce, signed by Henry, and confirmed by act of parliament, she refused to admit its validity, she being Henry's wife, and not his subject. The bishop describes her conduct in his letter: "She being therewith in great choler and agony, and always interrupting our words, declared that she would never leave the name of queen, but would persist in accounting herself the king's wife till death." When the official letter containing minutes of their conference, was shown to her, she seized a pen, and dashed it angrily across

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every sentence in which she was styled *Princess-dowager.*

If now we turn to that inimitable scene between Katherine and the two cardinals (act iii., scene 1), we shall observe how finely Shakspeare has condensed these incidents, and unfolded to us all the workings of Katherine's proud yet feminine nature. She is discovered at work with some of her women—she calls for music "to soothe her soul, grown sad with troubles"—then follows the little song, of which the sentiment is so well adapted to the occasion, while its quaint yet classic elegance breathes the very spirit of those times, when Surry loved and sung.

SONG.

Orpheus with his lute made trees,
And the mountain-tops that freeze,
  Bow themselves when he did sing:
To his music, plants and flowers
Ever sprung, as sun and showers
  There had made a lasting spring.

Every thing that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,

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Hung their heads and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care, and grief of heart,
Fall asleep, on hearing, die.

They are interrupted by the arrival of the two cardinals. Katherine's perception of their subtlety—her suspicion of their purpose—her sense of her own weakness and inability to contend with them, and her mild subdued dignity, are beautifully represented; as also the guarded self-command with which she eludes giving a definite answer; but when they counsel her to that which she, who knows Henry, feels must end in her ruin, then the native temper is roused at once, or, to use Tunstall's expression, "the choler and the agony," burst forth in words.

Is this your Christian counsel? Out upon ye!
Heaven is above all yet; there sits a Judge
That no king can corrupt.

WOLSEY.

Your rage mistakes us.

QUEEN KATHERINE.

The more shame for ye! Holy men I thought ye,

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Upon my soul, two reverend cardinal virtues;
But cardinal sins, and hollow hearts, I fear ye:
Mend them, for shame, my lords: is this your comfort,
The cordial that ye bring a wretched lady?

With the same force of language, and impetuous yet dignified feeling, she asserts her own conjugal truth and merit, and insists upon her rights.

Have I liv'd thus long (let me speak myself,
Since virtue finds no friends) a wife, a true one,
A woman (I dare say, without vain glory)
Never yet branded with suspicion?
Have I with all my full affections
Still met the king—lov'd him next heaven, obey'd him?
Been out of fondness superstitious to him—
Almost forgot my prayers to content him,
And am I thus rewarded? 't is not well, lords, &c.

My lord, I dare not make myself so guilty,
To give up willingly that noble title
Your master wed me to: nothing but death
Shall e'er divorce my dignities.

And this burst of unwonted passion is immediately followed by the natural reaction: it subsides into tears, dejection, and a mournful self-compassion.

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Would I had never trod this English ground,
Or felt the flatteries that grow upon it.
What will become of me now, wretched lady?
I am the most unhappy woman living.
Alas! poor wenches! where are now your fortunes?
[*To her women.*
Shipwrecked upon a kingdom, where no pity,
No friends, no hope, no kindred weep for me!
Almost no grave allowed me! Like the lily that once
Was mistress of the field, and flourish'd,
I'll hang my head and perish.

Dr. Johnson observes on this scene, that all Katherine's distresses could not save her from a quibble on the word *cardinal.*

Holy men I thought ye,
Upon my soul, two reverend cardinal virtues;
But cardinal sins, and hollow hearts, I fear ye!

When we read this passage in connexion with the situation and sentiment, the scornful play upon the words is not only appropriate and natural, it seems inevitable. Katherine, assuredly, is neither an imaginative nor a witty personage; but we all acknowledge the truism, that anger inspires wit, and whenever there is passion there is

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poetry. In the instance just alluded to, the sarcasm springs naturally out from the bitter indignation of the moment. In her grand rebuke of Wolsey, in the trial scene, how just and beautiful is the gradual elevation of her language, till it rises into that magnificent image—

> You have by fortune and his highness' favours,
> Gone slightly o'er low steps, and now are mounted,
> Where powers are your retainers, &c.

In the depth of her affliction, the pathos as naturally clothes itself in poetry.

> Like the lily,
> That once was mistress of the field, and flourish'd,
> I'll hang my head and perish.

But these, I believe, are the only instances of imagery throughout; for, in general, her language is plain and energetic. It has the strength and simplicity of her character, with very little metaphor and less wit.

In approaching the last scene of Katherine's life, I feel as if about to tread within a sanctuary, where nothing befits us but

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silence and tears; veneration so strives with compassion, tenderness with awe.[1]

We must suppose a long interval to have elapsed since Katherine's interview with the two cardinals. Wolsey was disgraced, and poor Anna Bullen at the height of her short-lived prosperity. It was Wolsey's fate to be detested by both queens. In the pursuance of his own selfish and ambitious

[1] Dr. Johnson is of opinion, that this scene "is above any other part of Shakspeare's tragedies, and perhaps above any scene of any other poet, tender and pathetic; without gods, or furies, or poisons, or precipices; without the help of romantic circumstances; without improbable sallies of poetical lamentation, and without any throes of tumultuous misery."

I have already observed, that in judging of Shakspeare's characters as of persons we meet in real life, we are swayed unconsciously by our own habits and feelings, and our preference governed, more or less, by our individual prejudices or sympathies. Thus, Dr. Johnson, who has not a word to bestow on Imogen, and who has treated poor Juliet as if he had been in truth "the very beadle to an amorous sigh," does full justice to the character of Katherine, because the logical turn of his mind, his vigorous intellect, and his austere integrity, enabled him to appreciate its peculiar beauties: and, accordingly, we find that he gives it, not only unqualified, but almost exclusive admiration: he goes so far as to assert, that in this play the genius of Shakspeare comes in and goes out with Katherine.

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designs, he had treated both with perfidy; and one was the remote, the other the immediate, cause of his ruin.[1]

The ruffian king, of whom one hates to think, was bent on forcing Katherine to concede her rights, and illegitimize her daughter in favour of the offspring of Anna Bullen: she steadily refused, was declared contumacious, and the sentence of divorce pronounced in 1533. Such of her attendants as persisted in paying her the honours due to a queen, were driven from her household; those who consented to serve her as princess-dowager she refused to admit into her presence; so that she remained unattended, except by a few women, and her gentleman-usher, Griffith. During the

[1] It will be remembered, that in early youth Anna Bullen was betrothed to Lord Henry Percy, who was passionately in love with her. Wolsey, to serve the king's purposes, broke off this match, and forced Percy into an unwilling marriage with Lady Mary Talbot. "The stout Earl of Northumberland," who arrested Wolsey at York, was this very Percy: he was chosen for this mission by the interference of Anna Bullen: — a piece of vengeance truly feminine in its mixture of sentiment and spitefulness; and every way characteristic of the individual woman.

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last eighteen months of her life she resided at Kimbolton. Her nephew, Charles V., had offered her an asylum and princely treatment; but Katherine, broken in heart and declining in health, was unwilling to drag the spectacle of her misery and degradation into a strange country: she pined in her loneliness, deprived of her daughter, receiving no consolation from the pope, and no redress from the emperor. Wounded pride, wronged affection, and a cankering jealousy of the woman preferred to her (which, though it never broke out into unseemly words, is enumerated as one of the causes of her death), at length wore out a feeble frame. "Thus," says the chronicle, "Queen Katherine fell into her last sickness; and though the king sent to comfort her through Chapuys, the emperor's ambassador, she grew worse and worse; and finding death now coming, she caused a maid attending on her to write to the king to this effect:

"My most dear Lord, King, and Husband;

"The hour of my death now approaching,

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I cannot choose but, out of the love I bear you, advise you of your soul's health, which you ought to prefer before all considerations of the world or flesh whatsoever; for which yet you have cast me into many calamities, and yourself into many troubles; but I forgive you all, and pray God to do so likewise; for the rest, I commend unto you Mary our daughter, beseeching you to be a father to her, as I have heretofore desired. I must intreat you also to respect my maids, and give them in marriage, which is not much, they being but three, and all my other servants a year's pay besides their due, lest otherwise they be unprovided for; lastly, I make this vow, that mine eyes desire you above all things.—Farewell!"[1]

She also wrote another letter to the ambassador, desiring that he would remind the king of her dying request, and urge him to do her this last right.

[1] The king is said to have wept on reading this letter, and her body being interred at Peterboro', in the monastery, for honour of her memory it was preserved at the dissolution, and erected into a bishop's see.—*Herbert's Life of Henry VIII.*

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What the historian relates, Shakspeare realizes. On the wonderful beauty of Katherine's closing scene we need not dwell; for that requires no illustration. In transferring the sentiments of her letter to her lips, Shakspeare has given them added grace, and pathos, and tenderness, without injuring their truth and simplicity: the feelings, and almost the manner of expression, are Katherine's own. The severe justice with which she draws the character of Wolsey is extremely characteristic! the benign candour with which she listens to the praise of him "whom living she most hated," is not less so. How beautiful her religious enthusiasm!—the slumber which visits her pillow, as she listens to that sad music she called her knell; her awakening from the vision of celestial joy to find herself still on earth—

> Spirits of peace! where are ye? are ye gone,
> And leave me here in wretchedness behind ye?

how unspeakably beautiful! And to consummate all in one final touch of truth and

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nature, we see that consciousness of her own worth and integrity which had sustained her through all her trials of heart, and that pride of station for which she had contended through long years,—which had become more dear by opposition, and by the perseverance with which she had asserted it,—remaining the last strong feeling upon her mind, to the very last hour of existence.

> When I am dead, good wench,
> Let me be used with honour: strew me over
> With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
> I was a chaste wife to my grave: embalm me,
> Then lay me forth: although unqueen'd, yet like
> A queen, and daughter to a king, inter me.
> I can no more.

In the epilogue to this play,[1] it is recommended—

> To the merciful construction of good women,
> For *such a one* we show'd them:

alluding to the character of Queen Kathe-

[1] Written (as the commentators suppose), not by Shakspeare, but by Ben Jonson.

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rine. Shakspeare has, in fact, placed before us a queen and a heroine, who in the first place, and above all, is a *good* woman; and I repeat, that in doing so, and in trusting for all his effect to truth and virtue, he has given a sublime proof of his genius and his wisdom;—for which, among many other obligations, we women remain his debtors.

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LADY MACBETH.

I doubt whether the epithet *historical* can properly apply to the character of Lady Macbeth; for though the subject of the play be taken from history, we never think of her with any reference to historical associa-

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tions, as we do with regard to Constance, Volumnia, Katherine of Arragon, and others. I remember reading some critique, in which Lady Macbeth was styled the "*Scottish queen;*" and methought the title, as applied to *her*, sounded like a vulgarism. It appears that the real wife of Macbeth,—she who lives only in the obscure record of an obscure age, bore the very unmusical appellation of Graoch, and was instigated to the murder of Duncan, not only by ambition, bnt by motives of vengeance. She was the granddaughter of Kenneth the Fourth, killed in 1003, fighting against Malcolm the Second, the father of Duncan. Macbeth reigned over Scotland from the year 1039 to 1056;—but what is all this to the purpose? The sternly magnificent creation of the poet stands before us independent of all these aids of fancy: she is Lady Macbeth; as such she lives, she reigns, and is immortal in the world to imagination. What earthly title could add to her grandeur? what human record or attestation strengthen our impression of her reality?

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Characters in history move before us like a procession of figures in *basso relievo:* we see one side only, that which the artist chose to exhibit to us; the rest is sunk in the block: the same characters in Shakspeare are like the statues *cut out* of the block, fashioned, finished, tangible in every part: we may consider them under every aspect, we may examine them on every side. As the classical times, when the garb did not make the man, were peculiarly favourable to the development and delineation of the human form, and have handed down to us the purest models of strength and grace—so the times in which Shakspeare lived were favourable to the vigorous delineation of natural character. Society was not then one vast conventional masquerade of manners. In his revelations, the accidental circumstances are to the individual character, what the drapery of the antique statue is to the statue itself; it is evident, that, though adapted to each other, and studied relatively, they were also studied separately. We trace through the folds the fine and true

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proportions of the figure beneath: they seem and are independent of each other to the practised eye, though carved together from the same enduring substance; at once perfectly distinct and eternally inseparable. In history we can but study character in relation to events, to situation and circumstances, which disguise and encumber it; we are left to imagine, to infer, what certain people must have been, from the manner in which they have acted or suffered. Shakspeare and nature bring us back to the true order of things; and showing us what the human being *is*, enable us to judge of the possible as well as the positive result in acting and suffering. Here, instead of judging the individual by his actions, we are enabled to judge of actions by a reference to the individual. When we can carry this power into the experience of real life, we shall perhaps be more just to one another, and not consider ourselves aggrieved, because we cannot gather figs from thistles and grapes from thorns.

In the play or poem of Macbeth, the in-

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terest of the story is so engrossing, the events so rapid and so appalling, the accessories so sublimely conceived and so skilfully combined, that it is difficult to detach Lady Macbeth from the dramatic situation, or consider her apart from the terrible associations of our first and earliest impressions. As the vulgar idea of a Juliet—that all beautiful and heaven-gifted child of the south—is merely a love-sick girl in white satin, so the common-place idea of Lady Macbeth, though endowed with the rarest powers, the loftiest energies, and the profoundest affections, is nothing but a fierce, cruel woman, brandishing a couple of daggers, and inciting her husband to butcher a poor old king.

Even those who reflect more deeply are apt to consider rather the mode in which a certain character is manifested, than the combination of abstract qualities making up that individual human being; so what should be last, is first; effects are mistaken for causes, qualities are confounded with their results, and the perversion of

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what is essentially good, with the operation of positive evil. Hence it is, that those who can feel and estimate the magnificent conception and poetical development of the character, have overlooked the grand moral lesson it conveys; they forget that the crime of Lady Macbeth terrifies us in proportion as we sympathize with her; and that this sympathy is in proportion to the degree of pride, passion, and intellect, we may ourselves possess. It is good to behold and to tremble at the possible result of the noblest faculties uncontrolled or perverted. True it is, that the ambitious women of these civilised times do not murder sleeping kings: but are there, therefore, no Lady Macbeths in the world? no women who, under the influence of a diseased or excited appetite for power or distinction, would sacrifice the happiness of a daughter, the fortunes of a husband, the principles of a son, and peril their own souls?

* * * * *

The character of Macbeth is considered as one of the most complex in the whole

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range of Shakspeare's dramatic creations. He is represented in the course of the action under such a variety of aspects; the good and evil qualities of his mind are so poised and blended, and instead of being gradually and successively developed, evolve themselves so like shifting lights and shadows playing over the "unstable waters," that his character has afforded a continual and interesting subject of analysis and contemplation. None of Shakspeare's personages have been treated of more at large; none have been more minutely criticised and profoundly examined. A single feature in his character — the question, for instance, as to whether his courage be personal or constitutional, or excited by mere desperation—has been canvassed, asserted, and refuted, in two masterly essays.

On the other hand, the character of Lady Macbeth resolves itself into few and simple elements. The grand features of her character are so distinctly and prominently marked, that though acknowledged to be

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one of the poet's most sublime creations, she has been passed over with comparatively few words: generally speaking, the commentators seem to have considered Lady Macbeth rather with reference to her husband, and as influencing the action of the drama, than as an individual conception of amazing power, poetry, and beauty: or if they do individualize her, it is ever with those associations of scenic representation which Mrs. Siddons has identified with the character. Those who have been accustomed to see it arrayed in the form and lineaments of that magnificent woman, and developed with her wonder-working powers, seem satisfied to leave it there, as if nothing more could be said or added.[1]

[1] Mrs. Siddons left among her papers an analysis of the character of Lady Macbeth, which I have never seen; but I have heard her say, that after playing the part for thirty years, she never read it over without discovering in it something new. She had an idea that Lady Macbeth must from her Celtic origin have been a small, fair, blue-eyed woman. Bonduca, Fredegonde, Brunehault, and other Amazons of the gothic ages were of this complexion; yet I cannot help fancying Lady Macbeth dark, like Black Agnes of Douglas—a sort of Lady Macbeth in her way.

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But the generation which beheld Mrs. Siddons in her glory is passing away, and we are again left to our own unassisted feelings, or to all the satisfaction to be derived from the sagacity of critics and the reflections of commentators. Let us turn to them for a moment.

Dr. Johnson, who seems to have regarded her as nothing better than a kind of ogress, tells us in so many words that "Lady Macbeth is merely detested." Schlegel dismisses her in haste, as a species of female fury. In the two essays on Macbeth already mentioned, she is passed over with one or two slight allusions. The only justice that has yet been done to her is by Hazlitt, in the "Characters of Shakspeare's Plays." Nothing can be finer than his remarks as far as they go, but his plan did not allow him sufficient space to work out his own conception of the character, with the minuteness it requires. All that he says is just in sentiment, and most eloquent in the expression; but in leaving some of the finest points altogether untouched, he

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has also left us in doubt whether he even felt or perceived them: and this masterly criticism stops short of the *whole* truth—it is a little superficial, and a little too harsh.

In the mind of Lady Macbeth, ambition is represented as the ruling motive, an intense overmastering passion, which is gratified at the expense of every just and generous principle, and every feminine feeling. In the pursuit of her object she is cruel, treacherous, and daring. She is doubly, trebly dyed in guilt and blood; for the murder she instigates is rendered more frightful by disloyalty and ingratitude, and by the violation of all the most sacred claims of kindred and hospitality. When her husband's more kindly nature shrinks from the perpetration of the deed of horror, she, like an evil genius, whispers him on to his damnation. The full measure of her wickedness is never disguised, the magnitude and atrocity of her crime is never extenuated, forgotten, or forgiven, in the whole course of the play. Our judgment is not bewildered, nor our moral feeling

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insulted, by the sentimental jumble of great crimes and dazzling virtues, after the fashion of the German school, and of some admirable writers of our own time. Lady Macbeth's amazing power of intellect, her inexorable determination of purpose, her superhuman strength of nerve, render her as fearful in herself as her deeds are hateful; yet she is not a mere monster of depravity, with whom we have nothing in common, nor a meteor whose destroying path we watch in ignorant affright and amaze. She is a terrible impersonation of evil passions and mighty powers, never so far removed from our own nature as to be cast beyond the pale of our sympathies; for the woman herself remains a woman to the last—still linked with her sex and with humanity.

This impression is produced partly by the essential truth in the conception of the character, and partly by the manner in which it is evolved; by a combination of minute and delicate touches, in some instances by speech, in others by silence: at

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one time by what is revealed, at another by what we are left to infer. As in real life, we perceive distinctions in character we cannot always explain, and receive impressions for which we cannot always account, without going back to the beginning of an acquaintance, and recalling many and trifling circumstances—looks, and tones, and words: thus to explain that hold which Lady Macbeth, in the midst of all her atrocities, still keeps upon our feelings, it is necessary to trace minutely the action of the play, as far as she is concerned in it, from its very commencement to its close.

We must then bear in mind, that the first idea of murdering Duncan is not suggested by Lady Macbeth to her husband: it springs within *his* mind, and is revealed to us, before his first interview with his wife,—before she is introduced or even alluded to.

MACBETH.

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor—

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If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?

It will be said, that the same "horrid suggestion" presents itself spontaneously to her, on the reception of his letter; or rather, that the letter itself acts upon her mind as the prophecy of the Weird Sisters on the mind of her husband, kindling the latent passion for empire into a quenchless flame. We are prepared to see the train of evil, first lighted by hellish agency, extend itself to *her* through the medium of her husband; but we are spared the more revolting idea that it originated with her. The guilt is thus more equally divided than we should suppose, when we hear people pitying "the noble nature of Macbeth," bewildered and goaded on to crime, solely or chiefly by the instigation of his wife.

It is true that she afterwards appears the more active agent of the two; but it is less through her pre-eminence in wickedness than through her superiority of intellect.

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The eloquence—the fierce, fervid eloquence with which she bears down the relenting and reluctant spirit of her husband, the dexterous sophistry with which she wards off his objections, her artful and affected doubts of his courage—the sarcastic manner in which she lets fall the word coward—a word which no man can endure from another, still less from a woman, and least of all from a woman he loves—and the bold address with which she removes all obstacles, silences all arguments, overpowers all scruples, and marshals the way before him, absolutely make us shrink before the commanding intellect of the woman, with a terror in which interest and admiration are strangely mingled.

LADY MACBETH.

He has almost supp'd: why have you left the chamber?

MACBETH.

Hath he ask'd for me?

LADY MACBETH.

Know you not he has?

MACBETH.

We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honoured me of late, and I have bought

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Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Nor cast aside so soon.

LADY MACBETH.

Was the hope drunk,
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since,
And wakes it now to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour,
As thou art in desire? Would'st thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem;
Letting I dare not wait upon I would,
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

MACBETH.

Pr'ythee peace:
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

LADY MACBETH.

What beast was it then,
That made you break this enterprize to me?
Where you durst do it, there you were a man;
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both;
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now

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Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it were smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn, as you
Have done to this.

MACBETH.
If we should fail,——

LADY MACBETH.
We fail.[1]
But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail.

Again, in the murdering scene, the obdurate inflexibility of purpose with which she drives on Macbeth to the execution of their

[1] In her impersonation of the part of Lady Macbeth, Mrs. Siddons adopted successively three different intonations in giving the words *we fail*. At first, a quick, contemptuous interrogation—"*we fail?*" Afterwards, with the note of admiration—*we fail!* and an accent of indignant astonishment, laying the principal emphasis on the word *we*—*we* fail! Lastly, she fixed on what I am convinced is the true reading—we fail. with the simple period, modulating her voice to a deep, low, resolute tone, which settled the issue at once—at though she had said, "if we fail, why then we fail, and all is over." This is consistent with the dark fatalism of the character and the sense of the line following, and the effect was sublime, almost awful.

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project, and her masculine indifference to blood and death, would inspire unmitigated disgust and horror, but for the involuntary consciousness that it is produced rather by the exertion of a strong power over herself, than by absolute depravity of disposition and ferocity of temper. This impression of her character is brought home at once to our very hearts with the most profound knowledge of the springs of nature within us, the most subtle mastery over their various operations, and a feeling of dramatic effect not less wonderful. The very passages in which Lady Macbeth displays the most savage and relentless determination, are so worded as to fill the mind with the idea of sex, and place the *woman* before us in all her dearest attributes, at once softening and refining the horror, and rendering it more intense. Thus when she reproaches her husband for his weakness—

> From this time
> Such I account thy love!

Again,

> Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, ye murdering ministers,

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> That compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, &c.
>
> I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis
> To love the babe that milks me, &c.

And lastly, in the moment of extremest horror comes that unexpected touch of feeling, so startling, yet so wonderfully true to nature—

> Had he not resembled my father as he slept,
> I had done it!

Thus in one of Weber's or Beethoven's grand symphonies, some unexpected soft minor chord or passage will steal on the ear, heard amid the magnificent crash of harmony, making the blood pause, and filling the eye with unbidden tears.

It is particularly observable, that in Lady Macbeth's concentrated, strong-nerved ambition, the ruling passion of her mind, there is yet a touch of womanhood; she is ambitious less for herself than for her husband. It is fair to think this, because we have no reason to draw any other inference either

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from her words or actions. In her famous soliloquy, after reading her husband's letter, she does not once refer to herself. It is of him she thinks: she wishes to see her husband on the throne, and to place the sceptre within *his* grasp. The strength of her affections adds strength to her ambition. Although in the old story of Boethius we are told that the wife of Macbeth "burned with unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen," yet in the aspect under which Shakspeare has represented the character to us, the selfish part of this ambition is kept out of sight. We must remark also, that in Lady Macbeth's reflections on her husband's character, and on that milkiness of nature, which she fears "may impede him from the golden round," there is no indication of female scorn: there is exceeding pride, but no egotism in the sentiment or the expression; no want of wifely and womanly respect and love for *him*, but, on the contrary, a sort of unconsciousness of her own mental superiority, which she betrays rather than asserts,

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as interesting in itself as it is most admirably conceived and delineated.

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised;—Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way. Thou would'st be great;
Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it. What thou would'st highly,
That would'st thou holily; would'st not play false,
And yet would'st wrongly win: thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, *This thou must do, if thou have it;*
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical[1] aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal.

Nor is there anything vulgar in her ambition: as the strength of her affections lends to it something profound and concentrated, so her splendid imagination invests the object of her desire with its own

[1] *Metaphysical* is here used in the sense of spiritual or preternatural.

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radiance. We cannot trace in her grand and capacious mind that it is the mere baubles and trappings of royalty which dazzle and allure her: hers is the sin of the "star-bright apostate," and she plunges with her husband into the abyss of guilt, to procure for "all their days and nights sole sovereign sway and masterdom." She revels, she luxuriates in her dream of power. She reaches at the golden diadem, which is to sear her brain; she perils life and soul for its attainment, with an enthusiasm as perfect, a faith as settled, as that of the martyr, who sees at the stake, heaven and its crowns of glory opening upon him.

> Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
> Greater than both by the all-hail *hereafter!*
> Thy letters have transported me beyond
> This ignorant present, and I feel now
> The future in the instant!

This is surely the very rapture of ambition! and those who have heard Mrs. Siddons pronounce the word *hereafter*, cannot forget the look, the tone, which

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seemed to give her auditors a glimpse of that awful *future*, which she, in her prophetic fury, beholds upon the instant.

But to return to the text before us: Lady Macbeth having proposed the object to herself and arrayed it with an ideal glory, fixes her eye steadily upon it, soars far above all womanish feelings and scruples to attain it, and stoops upon her victim with the strength and velocity of a vulture; but having committed unflinchingly the crime necessary for the attainment of her purpose, she stops there. After the murder of Duncan, we see Lady Macbeth, during the rest of the play, occupied in supporting the nervous weakness and sustaining the fortitude of her husband; for instance, Macbeth is at one time on the verge of frenzy, between fear and horror, and it is clear that if she loses her self-command, both must perish—

MACBETH.

One cried, God help us! and Amen! the other,
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands

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Listening their fear, I could not say *Amen!*
When they did cry *God bless us!*

LADY MACBETH.

Consider it not so deeply!

MACBETH.

But wherefore could not I pronounce amen?
I had most need of blessing, and amen
Stuck in my throat.

LADY MACBETH.

These deeds must not be thought on
After these ways: so, it will make us mad.

MACBETH.

Methought I heard a voice cry,
"Sleep no more." &c.

LADY MACBETH.

What do you mean? who was it that thus cried?
Why, worthy Thane,
You do unbend your noble strength to think
So brainsickly of things.—Go, get some water, &c.

Afterwards in act iii. she is represented as muttering to herself,

Nought's had, all's spent,
When our desire is got without content;

yet immediately addresses her moody and conscience-stricken husband—

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> How now, my lord? why do you keep alone,
> Of sorriest fancies your companions making;
> Using those thoughts, which should indeed have died
> With them they think on? Things without remedy
> Should be without regard; what's done, is done.

But she is no where represented as urging him on to new crimes; so far from it, that when Macbeth darkly hints his purposed assassination of Banquo, and she inquires his meaning, he replies,

> Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
> Till thou approve the deed.

The same may be said of the destruction of Macduff's family. Every one must perceive how our detestation of the woman had been increased, if she had been placed before us as suggesting and abetting those additional cruelties into which Macbeth is hurried by his mental cowardice.

If my feeling of Lady Macbeth's character be just to the conception of the poet, then she is one who could steel herself to the commission of a crime from necessity and expediency, and be daringly wicked for

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a great end, but not likely to perpetrate gratuitous murders from any vague or selfish fears. I do not mean to say that the perfect confidence existing between herself and Macbeth could possibly leave her in ignorance of his actions or designs: that heart-broken and shuddering allusion to the murder of Lady Macduff (in the sleeping scene) proves the contrary:

> The thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now?

But she is no where brought before us in immediate connexion with these horrors, and we are spared any flagrant proof of her participation in them. This may not strike us at first, but most undoubtedly has an effect on the general bearing of the character, considered as a whole.

Another more obvious and pervading source of interest arises from that bond of entire affection and confidence which, through the whole of this dreadful tissue of crime and its consequences, unites Macbeth and his wife; claiming from us an involuntary respect and sympathy, and shedding a

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softening influence over the whole tragedy. Macbeth leans upon her strength, trusts in her fidelity, and throws himself on her tenderness.

> O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!

She sustains him, calms him, soothes him—

> Come on;
> Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks;
> Be bright and jovial 'mong your guests to-night.

The endearing epithets, the terms of fondness in which he addresses her, and the tone of respect she invariably maintains towards him, even when most exasperated by his vacillation of mind and his brain-sick terrors, have by the very force of contrast a powerful effect on the fancy.

By these tender redeeming touches we are impressed with a feeling that Lady Macbeth's influence over the affections of her husband, as a wife and a woman, is at least equal to her power over him as a superior mind. Another thing has always struck me. During the supper scene, in

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which Macbeth is haunted by the spectre of the murdered Banquo, and his reason appears unsettled by the extremity of his horror and dismay, her indignant rebuke, her low whispered remonstrance, the sarcastic emphasis with which she combats his sick fancies, and endeavours to recall him to himself, have an intenseness, a severity, a bitterness, which makes the blood creep.

LADY MACBETH.

Are you a man?

MACBETH.

Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil.

LADY MACBETH.

O proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear:
This is the air-drawn dagger, which you said
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts
(Impostors to true fear) would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authoriz'd by her grandam! Shame itself!
Why do you make such faces? When all 's done
You look but on a stool.
What! quite unmann'd in folly?

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Yet when the guests are dismissed, and they are left alone, she says no more, and not a syllable of reproach or scorn escapes her: a few words in submissive reply to his questions, and an entreaty to seek repose, are all she permits herself to utter. There is a touch of pathos and of tenderness in this silence which has always affected me beyond expression: it is one of the most masterly and most beautiful traits of character in the whole play.

Lastly, it is clear that in a mind constituted like that of Lady Macbeth, and not utterly depraved and hardened by the habit of crime, conscience must wake some time or other, and bring with it remorse closed by despair, and despair by death. This great moral retribution was to be displayed to us—but how? Lady Macbeth is not a woman to start at shadows; she mocks at air-drawn daggers; she sees no imagined spectres rise from the tomb to appal or accuse her.[1] The towering bravery

[1] Mrs. Siddons, I believe, had an idea that Lady Macbeth beheld the spectre of Banquo in the supper scene, and

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of *her* mind disdains the visionary terrors which haunt her weaker husband. We know, or rather we feel, that she who could give a voice to the most direful intent, and call on the spirits that wait on mortal thoughts to "unsex her," and "stop up all access and passage of remorse"—to that remorse would have given nor tongue nor sound; and that rather than have uttered a complaint, she would have held her breath and died. To have given her a confidant, though in the partner of her guilt, would have been a degrading resource, and have disappointed and enfeebled all our previous impressions of her character; yet justice is to be done, and we are to be made acquainted with that which the woman herself would have suffered a thousand deaths of torture rather than have betrayed. In the sleeping scene we have a glimpse into the depths of that inward hell: the

that her self-control and presence of mind enabled her to surmount her consciousness of the ghastly presence. This would be superhuman, and I do not see that either the character or the text bear out this supposition.

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seared brain and broken heart are laid bare before us in the helplessness of slumber. By a judgment the most sublime ever imagined, yet the most unforced, natural, and inevitable, the sleep of her who murdered sleep is no longer repose, but a condensation of resistless horrors which the prostrate intellect and the powerless will can neither baffle nor repel. We shudder and are satisfied; yet our human sympathies are again touched: we rather sigh over the ruin than exult in it; and after watching her through this wonderful scene with a sort of fascination, we dismiss the unconscious, helpless, despair-stricken murderess, with a feeling which Lady Macbeth, in her waking strength, with all her awe-commanding powers about her, could never have excited.

It is here especially we perceive that sweetness of nature which in Shakspeare went hand in hand with his astonishing powers. He never confounds that line of demarcation which eternally separates good from evil, yet he never places evil before us

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without exciting in some way a consciousness of the opposite good which shall balance and relieve it.

I do deny that he has represented in Lady Macbeth a woman "*naturally cruel*,"[1] "*invariably savage*,"[2] or endued with "*pure demoniac firmness.*[3] If ever there could have existed a woman to whom such phrases could apply—a woman without touch of modesty, pity, or fear,—Shakspeare knew that a thing so monstrous was unfit for all the purposes of poetry. If Lady Macbeth had been *naturally* cruel, she needed not so solemnly to have abjured all pity, and called on the spirits that wait on mortal thoughts to *unsex* her; nor would she have been loved to excess by a man of Macbeth's character; for it is the sense of intellectual energy and strength of will overpowering her feminine nature, which draws from him that burst of intense admiration—

> Bring forth men children only,
> For thy undaunted metal should compose
> Nothing but males.

[1] Cumberland. [2] Professor Richardson.
[3] Forster's Essays.

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If she had been *invariably* savage, her love would not have comforted and sustained her husband in his despair, nor would her uplifted dagger have been arrested by a dear and venerable image rising between her soul and its fell purpose. If endued with *pure demoniac firmness*, her woman's nature would not, by the reaction, have been so horribly avenged,—she would not have died of remorse and despair.

* * * *

We cannot but observe, that through the whole of the dialogue appropriated to Lady Macbeth, there is something very peculiar and characteristic in the turn of expression: her compliments, when she is playing the hostess or the queen, are elaborately elegant and verbose: but, when in earnest, she speaks in short energetic sentences—sometimes abrupt, but always full of meaning; her thoughts are rapid and clear, her expressions forcible, and the imagery like sudden flashes of lightning: all the foregoing extracts exhibit this, but I will venture one more, as an immediate illustration.

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MACBETH.

My dearest love,
Duncan comes here to-night.

LADY MACBETH.

And when goes hence?

MACBETH.

To-morrow,—as he purposes.

LADY MACBETH.

O never
Shall sun that morrow see!
Thy face, my Thane, is as a book, where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time:
Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
Your tongue, your hand; look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under it.

What would not the firmness the self-command, the enthusiasm, the intellect, the ardent affections of this woman have performed, if properly directed? but the object being unworthy of the effort, the end is disappointment, despair, and death.

The power of religion could alone have controlled such a mind; but it is the misery of a very proud, strong, and gifted spirit, without sense of religion, that instead of

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looking upward to find a superior, it looks round and sees all things as subject to itself. Lady Macbeth is placed in a dark, ignorant, iron age; her powerful intellect is slightly tinged with its credulity and superstition, but she has no religious feeling to restrain the force of will. She is a stern fatalist in principle and action—"what is done, is done," and would be done over again under the same circumstances; her remorse is without repentance, or any reference to an offended Deity; it arises from the pang of a wounded conscience, the recoil of the violated feelings of nature: it is the horror of the past, not the terror of the future; the torture of self-condemnation, not the fear of judgment; it is strong as her soul, deep as her guilt, fatal as her resolve, and terrible as her crime.

If it should be objected to this view of Lady Macbeth's character, that it engages our sympathies in behalf of a perverted being—and that to leave her so strong a power upon our feelings in the midst of such supreme wickedness, involves a moral wrong, I can only reply in the words of Dr. Chan-

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ning, that " in this and the like cases, our interest fastens on what is *not* evil in the character—that there is something kindling and ennobling in the consciousness, however awakened, of the energy which resides in mind: and many a virtuous man has borrowed new strength from the force, constancy, and dauntless courage of evil agents."[1]

This is true; and might he not have added that many a powerful and gifted spirit has learnt humility and self-government, from beholding how far the energy which resides in mind may be degraded and perverted?

* * * * *

In general, when a woman is introduced into a tragedy to be the presiding genius of evil in herself or the cause of evil to others, she is either too feebly or too darkly portrayed; either crime is heaped on crime and horror on horror, till our sympathy is lost in incredulity, or the stimulus is sought in unnatural or impossible situations, or in situations

[1] See Dr. Channing's remarks on Satan, in his Essay " On the Character and Writings of Milton."—*Works*, p. 131.

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that ought to be impossible, (as in the Myrrha or the Cenci) or the character is enfeebled by a mixture of degrading propensities and sexual weakness, as in Vittoria Corombona. But Lady Macbeth, though so supremely wicked, and so consistently feminine, is still kept aloof from all base alloy. When Shakspeare created a female character purely detestable, he made her an accessary, never a principal. Thus Regan and Goneril are two powerful sketches of selfishness, cruelty, and ingratitude; we abhor them whenever we see or think of them, but we think very little about them, except as necessary to the action of the drama. They are to cause the madness of Lear, and to call forth the filial devotion of Cordelia, and their depravity is forgotten in its effects. A comparison has been made between Lady Macbeth and the Greek Clytemnestra in the Agamemnon of Eschylus. The Clytemnestra of Sophocles is something more in Shakspeare's spirit, for she is something less impudently atrocious; but, considered as a woman and an individual, would any one compare this shameless adulteress, cruel

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murderess, and unnatural mother, with Lady Macbeth? Lady Macbeth herself would certainly shrink from the approximation.[1]

The Electra of Sophocles comes nearer to Lady Macbeth as a poetical conception, with this strong distinction, that she commands more respect and esteem, and less sympathy. The murder in which she participates is ordained by the oracle—is an act of justice, and therefore less a murder than a sacrifice. Electra is drawn with magnificent simplicity and intensity of feeling and purpose, but there is a want of light, and shade, and relief. Thus the scene in which Orestes stabs his mother within her cham-

[1] The vision of Clytemnestra the night before she is murdered, in which she dreams that she has given birth to a dragon, and that in laying it to her bosom, it draws blood instead of milk, has been greatly admired; but I suppose that those who most admire it would not place it in comparison with Lady Macbeth's sleeping scene. Lady Ashton, in the Bride of Lammermoor, is a domestic Lady Macbeth; but the development being in the narrative, not the dramatic form, it follows hence that we have a masterly portrait, not a complete individual: and the relief of poetry and sympathy being wanting, the detestation she inspires is so unmixed as to be almost intolerable: consequently, the character, considered in relation to the other personages of the story, is perfect; but abstractedly, it is imperfect; a basso relievo—not a statue.

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ber, and she is heard pleading for mercy, while Electra stands forward listening exultingly to her mother's cries, and urging her brother to strike again, "another blow! another!" &c., is terribly fine, but the horror is too shocking, too *physical*—if I may use such an expression: it will not surely bear a comparison with the murdering scene in Macbeth, where the exhibition of various passions—the irresolution of Macbeth, the bold determination of his wife, the deep suspense, the rage of the elements without, the horrid stillness within, and the secret feeling of that infernal agency which is ever present to the fancy, even when not visible on the scene—throw a rich colouring of poetry over the whole, which does not take from "the present horror of the time," and yet relieves it. Shakspeare's blackest shadows are like those of Rembrandt; so intense, that the gloom which brooded over Egypt in her day of wrath was pale in comparison,—yet so transparent that we seem to see the light of heaven through their depth.

In the whole compass of dramatic poetry,

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there is but one female character which can be placed near that of Lady Macbeth; the MEDEA. Not the vulgar, voluble fury of the Latin tragedy,[1] nor the Medea in a hoop petticoat of Corneille, but the genuine Greek Medea—the Medea of Euripides.[2]

There is something in the *Medea* which seizes irresistibly on the imagination. Her passionate devotion to Jason, for whom she had left her parents and country—to whom she had given all, and

> Would have drawn the spirit from her breast
> Had he but asked it, sighing forth her soul
> Into his bosom,[3]

the wrongs and insults which drive her to desperation — the horrid refinement of cruelty with which she plans and executes her revenge upon her faithless husband— the gush of fondness with which she weeps over her children, whom in the next mo-

[1] Attributed to Seneca.

[2] A comparison has already been made in an article in the "Reflector." It will be seen on a reference to that very masterly Essay, that I differ from the author in his conception of Lady Macbeth's character.

[3] Appollonius Rhodius.—Vide Elton's Specimens of the Classic poets.

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ment she devotes to destruction in a paroxysm of insane fury, carry the terror and pathos of tragic situation to their extreme height. But if we may be allowed to judge through the medium of a translation, there is a certain hardness in the manner of treating the character, which in some degree defeats the effect. Medea talks too much: her human feelings and superhuman power are not sufficiently blended. Taking into consideration the different impulses which actuate Medea and Lady Macbeth, as love, jealousy, aud revenge on the one side, and ambition on the other, we expect to find more of female nature in the first than in the last: and yet the contrary is the fact: at least, my own impression, as far as a woman may judge of a woman, is, that although the passions of Medea are more feminine, the character is less so; we seem to require more feeling in her fierceness, more passion in her frenzy; something less of poetical abstraction,—less art, fewer words; her delirious vengeance we might forgive, but her calmness and subtlety are rather revolting.

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These two admirable characters, placed in contrast to each other, afford a fine illustration of Schlegel's distinction between the ancient or Greek drama, which he compares to sculpture, and the modern or romantic drama, which he compares to painting. The gothic grandeur, the rich chiaroscuro, and deep-toned colours of Lady Macbeth, stand thus opposed to the classical elegance and mythological splendour, the delicate yet inflexible outline of the Medea. If I might be permitted to carry this illustration still further, I would add, that there exists the same distinction between the Lady Macbeth and the Medea, as between the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci and the Medusa of the Greek gems and bas reliefs. In the painting the horror of the subject is at once exalted and softened by the most vivid colouring, and the most magical contrast of light and shade. We gaze—until from the murky depths of the back-gronnd the serpent hair seems to stir and glitter as if instinct with life, and the head itself, in all its ghastliness and brightness, appears to rise from the canvass with the glare of

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reality. In the Medusa of sculpture how different is the effect on the imagination! We have here the snakes convolving round the winged and graceful head: the brows contracted with horror and pain: but every feature is chiselled into the most regular and faultless perfection; and amid the gorgon terrors, there rests a marbly, fixed, supernatural grace, which, without reminding us for a moment of common life or nature, stands before us a presence, a power, and an enchantment!

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